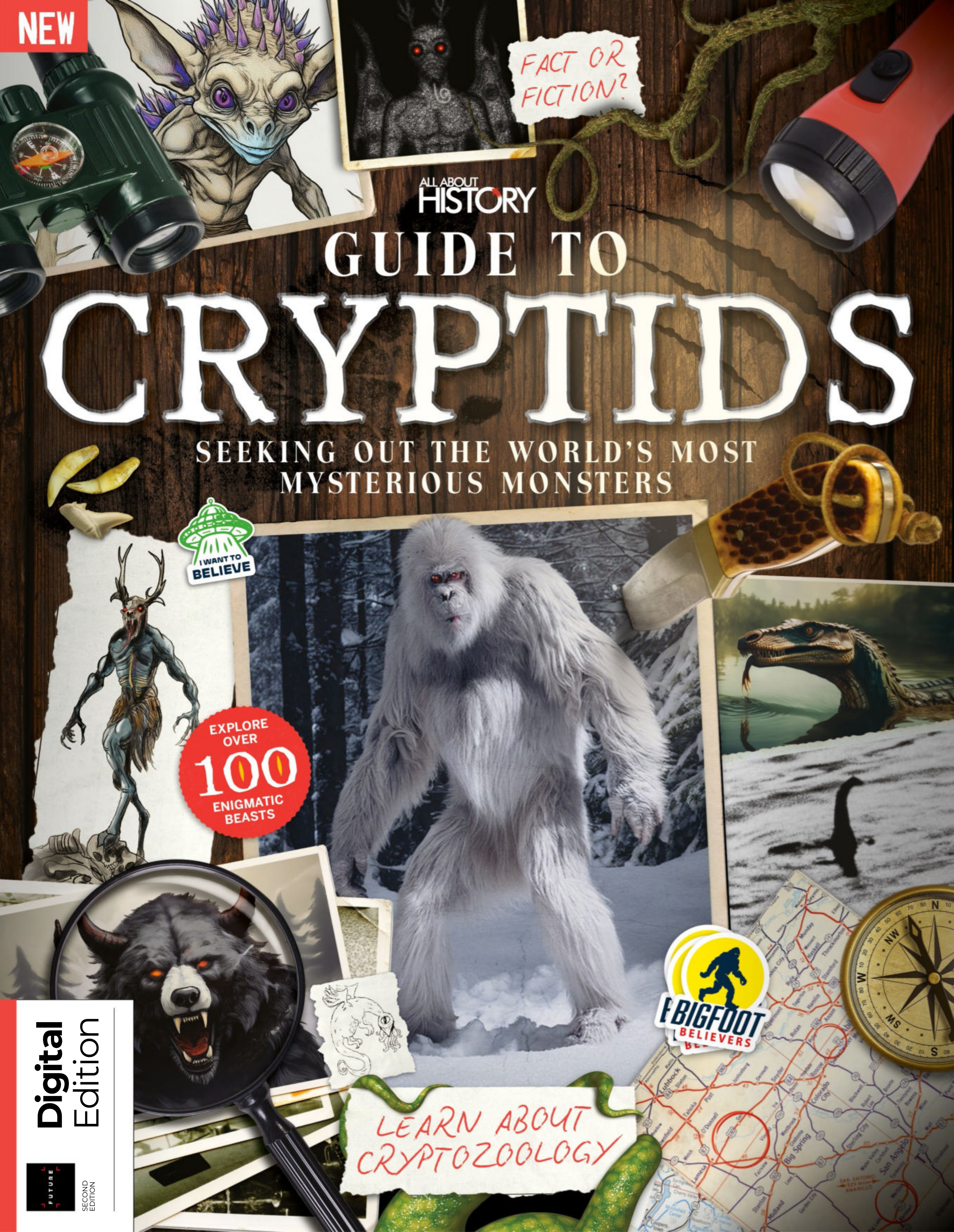
NEW

ALL ABOUT HISTORY

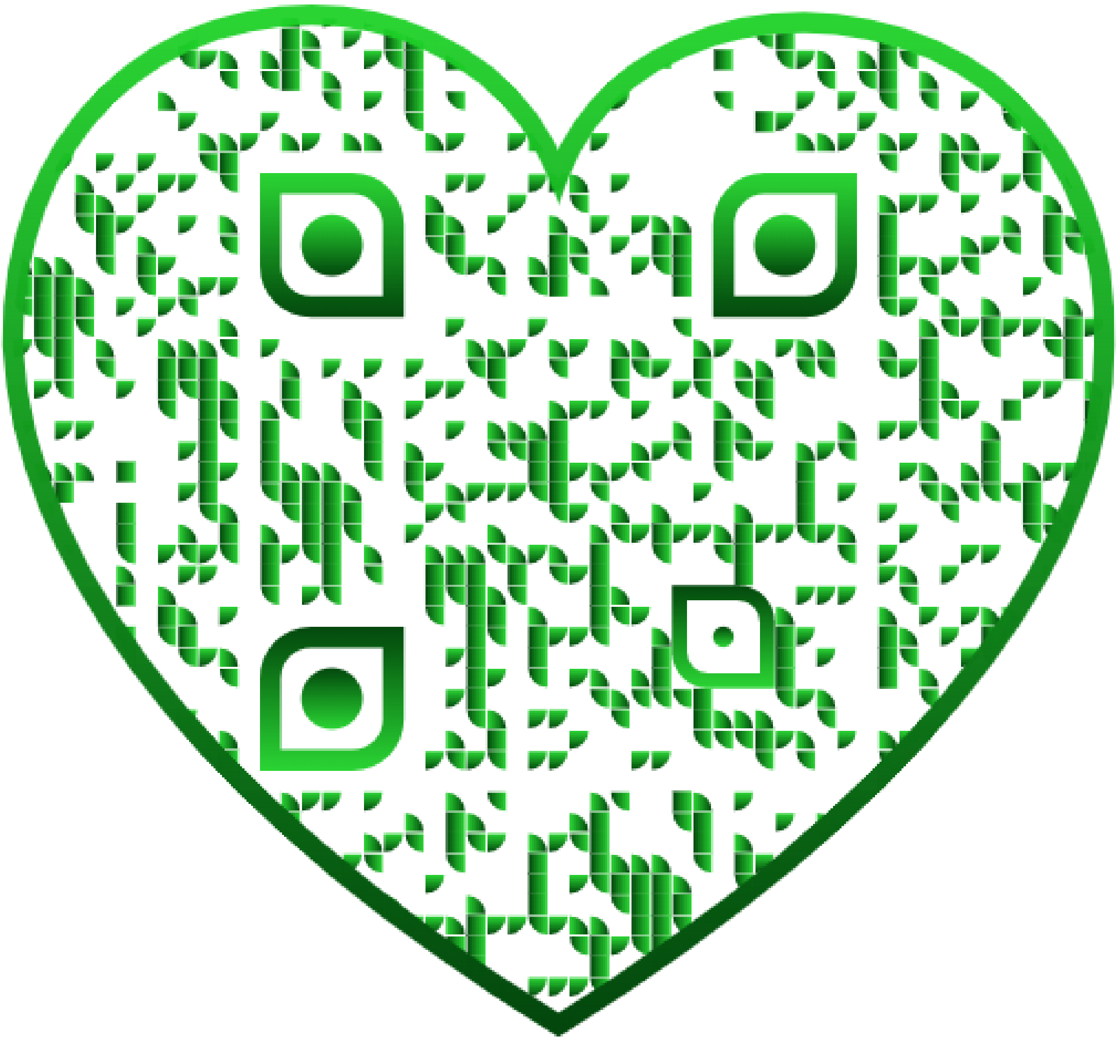
GUIDE TO CRYPTIDS

SEEKING OUT THE WORLD'S MOST MYSTERIOUS MONSTERS

EXPLORE OVER 100 ENIGMATIC BEASTS


FACT OR FICTION?
I WANT TO BELIEVE
BIGFOOT BELIEVERS
LEARN ABOUT CRYPTOZOOLOGY

Digital Edition
FUTURE
SECOND EDITION



WELCOME

Inside this book you will discover the fascinating world of cryptozoology! Derived from the ancient Greek to mean the “study of hidden animals”, this psuedoscience, led by researchers known as cryptozoologists, investigates the unfathomable fauna (and flora) that lurk in lore, and strives to find proof of the existence of these enigmatic creatures known as cryptids. Delve deep into the superstition and the science to find out if these bizarre beasts are fact or fiction. Investigate the legend of the Mothman, uncover the origins of the Jersey Devil, learn the difference between Bigfoot and Sasquatch, discover how many mythical monsters have been revealed to be real and join the ongoing search for the truth…

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THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF THE MONSTER HUNTERS

If a creature's existence is unsubstantiated or in dispute, the cryptozoologist is at hand to uncover the truth and reveal the hidden beast

Everyone knows what a zoologist is – a respected scientist who studies the anatomy, behaviour and evolution of animals. However, some creatures have managed to elude human identification and remain hidden in the shadows. Scientists work with facts, so if you can't see it, smell it, or hear it, chances are it doesn't exist and therefore doesn't warrant further investigation. Cryptozoologists, on the other hand, have made it their business to search for those creatures that are just beyond the reach of the conventional zoologists.

Dr Bernard Heuvelmans (1916-2001), known as 'the father of cryptozoology', coined the phrase after reading an article that suggested sauropod dinosaurs may still be roaming the plains of Central Africa. From that point onwards, Heuvelmans decided to use his zoological background and training in order to search for unknown animals that may or may not exist. Heuvelmans created 'cryptozoology' from the Greek roots of 'kryptos', meaning hidden, 'zoon', meaning animal, and 'logos', meaning discourse, ultimately constructing something to describe 'the study of hidden animals'.

Conventional scientists ridiculed Heuvelmans' decision to branch out into the unknown, following the arrogant attitudes of earlier zoologists such as Baron Georges Cuvier, who stated that no new species of large creatures were left to discover on land and that there were no serpents left to find in the oceans. This ludicrous comment was made before many animals such as the chimpanzee, the giant panda, the whale shark and the giant squid, were discovered and studied. Cuvier would later go on to disprove his own beliefs by discovering Cuvier's beaked whale, formerly considered to be the Water Owl cryptid.

> The Loch Ness Monster, aka Nessie, is one of the world's most famous cryptids and brings over one million visitors to Iverness, Scotland, every year

The aggressive, venomnous komodo dragon is the largest known living species of lizard but was nothing but a rumour until 1910

Heuvelmans gathered a vast array of information on thousands of mysterious creatures from all over the globe, and was joined by other scientists, such as Ivan T Sanderson, a Scottish zoologist, explorer, and all-round daredevil. He decided to dedicate his life to the study of unidentifiable animals after a terrifying incident in Cameroon, where he was attacked by a giant bat, known locally as the Kongamato.

Loren Coleman of the International Cryptozoology Museum in Portland, Maine, has his own model of Bigfoot on display

Gradually, more and more scientists from various academic backgrounds have turned their attention to such hidden beasts in the hope that proof of the existence of 'monsters' can be identified and catalogued. There have been a number of well-documented success stories. Those who told tales of monstrous, deadly poison-fanged lizards were vindicated in 1910 when the Komodo dragon was first discovered on an Indonesian island. Whispers of a gigantic spider as big as a dinner plate were found to be true, when the Goliath bird-eating tarantula was discovered in the upland rainforest regions of northern South America. Meanwhile, a coelacanth, a fish long since thought to have died out, was dredged up in a fishing net in 1938. During the 1980s, Australian scientist, Tim Flannery, went in search of the ancestral spirits of the Moni people, living in Western New Guinea. Having been told of the hairy little folk that live in the trees and walk bipedally, he was amazed to discover the Bondegezou were in fact real tree-dwelling marsupials with black-and-white fur. Today's active research includes Jeff Meldrum, professor of anatomy and anthropology, who specialises in foot morphology and is currently gathering hominid tracks for further analysis.

Adventurous and open-minded anthropologists, zoologists, palaeontologists and geneticists have all come together under the collective name 'cryptozoologist' to mount expeditions all over the world. Far from relying on wishful thinking, they use cutting-edge technology

CRYPTID CLASSIFICATIONS

Use this handy table to find out what your favourite elusive animals are classified as

	Group Description	Examples
1	Distribution Anomalies (known animals that have been observed in unexpected locations)	The Beast of Bodmin Moor (p108) Phantom Kangaroos
2	Undescribed, Unusual Or Outsized Variations Of Known Species/ Hybrids	Hogzilla (p81) Kellas Cat (p80)
3	Survivals Of Recently Extinct Species	Great auk Florida black wolf Thylacine (p110)
4	Survivals Of Species Known Only From Fossil Records Into Modern Times	Coelacanth
5	Lingerlings (survivals of species known from fossil record into more recent history than the general consensus, ie animals thought to have died out far earlier than a discovered carcass suggests)	Frozen mammoths Jarvan rhinoceros
6	Animals Not Known From The Fossil Record But Related To Known Species	The Andean wolf (p105)
7	Animals Not Known From The Fossil Record Nor Related To Any Known	Bigfoot (p44) Yeti (p54) Orang Pendek (p58)
8	Mythical Animals With A Zoological Basis	Mermaids (p72) Unicorn (p100) Dragon (p16) Griffin (p14) Basilisk
9	Seemingly Paranormal Or Supernatural Entities With Animal-like Characteristics	Mothman (p60) Jersey Devil (p66)

and forensic precision during excursions into unknown territory. An effective cryptozoologist bases their investigations on the theory of Occam's Razor – the simplest explanation is most likely the correct one. Contrary to popular belief, they do not blindly believe in all monsters. However, they always pay attention to the native people, irrespective of the Western world's incredulity since the local people know far more about their surroundings than an academic hiding behind his books in a Red Brick university.

What is a cryptid?

The most obvious definition of a cryptid is that of a creature whose existence has yet to be completely proven. However, the list of possible beasts can be further categorised. Although there are various filing systems for cryptids, the most commonly referred to is that of cryptozoologist, George M Eberhart, who organised them into ten distinct groups.

The first group consists of 'Distribution Anomalies'. This includes known animals that have been observed in unexpected locations, such as the anomalous Big Cat sightings reported in the UK.

The second group, known as 'Undescribed, Unusual Or Outsized Variations Of Known Species', includes

"ANTHROPOLOGISTS, ZOOLOGISTS, PALAEONTOLOGISTS AND GENETICISTS HAVE ALL COME TOGETHER UNDER THE COLLECTIVE NAME 'CRYPTOZOOLOGIST'"

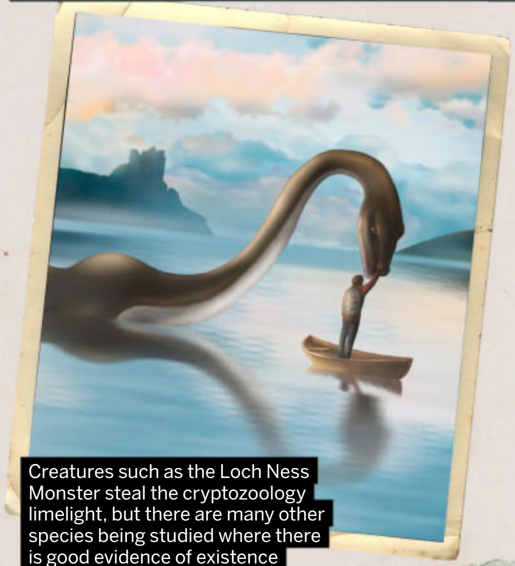
THE INTERNATIONAL CRYPTOZOOLOGY MUSEUM

Where else could you rub shoulders with Bigfoot, Yowie and a Feejee Mermaid?

No budding cryptozoologist can afford to pass up an opportunity to visit the International Cryptozoology Museum. Based across two sites, Portland and Bangor, Maine, USA, visitors are encouraged to explore unknown creatures from around the world. The museum is owned by world-famous cryptozoologist, Loren Coleman, who started displaying his impressive private collection back in 2003, before expanding to two sites in 2015. Alongside running the museum, Coleman is a reputable explorer and monster hunter as well as the author of various books on Fortean topics.

Visitors to the International Cryptozoology Museum are greeted by a three-metre (ten-foot) Bigfoot, and once inside, the building itself is bursting with rare and fascinating finds from Orang Pendek hair to Yeti faecal matter! Some of the installations set to delight include exhibits on the Dover Demon, the Jersey Devil, the Montauk Monster and the Skunk Apes. In August 2020, Coleman introduced his 'Sasquatch Revealed' exhibit, including a 2.7-metre (nine-foot) tall skeleton! Children can marvel at a life-size bronze of a thylacine, a fibreglass coelacanth, or Erik Gosselin's art sculpture of PT Barnum's Feejee Mermaid.

Meanwhile, books, CDs, DVDs, ornaments and many unique souvenirs can be purchased in the well-stocked gift shop.



Creatures such as the Loch Ness Monster steal the cryptozoology limelight, but there are many other species being studied where there is good evidence of existence

giant versions of creatures acknowledged by zoologists. This would include the giant anaconda of the Amazon. A rare zebra foal with spots instead of stripes that was discovered in the Maasai Mara National Reserve in 2019, would also come within this category. She was thought to be nothing but a simple hoax until a local guide took a photograph of the beautiful anomalous creature.

The third and fourth groups concern 'Survivals Of Recently Extinct Species' and 'Survivals Of Species Known Only From Fossil Records Into Modern Times'. There have been recent eyewitness accounts of the great auk and the Florida black wolf, both of which were thought to have died out. Many cryptozoologists believe the thylacine, the last of which is said to have died in 1936, may still be alive. Tracks are regularly found and over 500 eyewitness accounts have been recorded, both in Tasmania and the Australian mainland. The coelacanth mentioned earlier fits nicely into the fourth category.

The fifth group deals with 'Lingerlings'. These are creatures, such as frozen mammoths, that are thought to have died out far earlier than the discovered carcass suggests. The Australian cryptid, Gyedarra, an enormous grass-eating quadruped, is thought to be a Diprotodon that had supposedly died out with the dinosaurs. However, the Aborigines talk about the Gyedarra living alongside their forebearers.

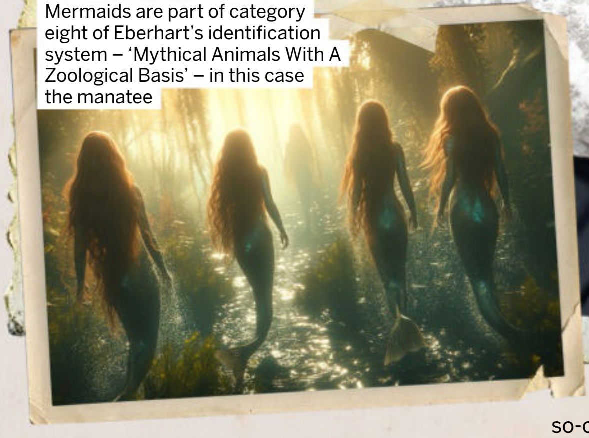
The sixth category includes 'Animals Not Known From The Fossil Record But Related To Known Species', while the seventh category deals with 'Animals Not Known From The Fossil Record Nor Related To Any Known'. This fascinating group includes unknown hominids such as the world-famous Bigfoot.

Category eight is identified as 'Mythical Animals With A Zoological Basis'. This group includes dragons, based on Komodo dragons; mermaids, based on the manatee; and the mythical unicorn, most likely based on the mysterious narwhal.

The ninth category considers 'Seemingly Paranormal Or Supernatural Entities With Animal-like Characteristics'. This is the group that most people think of when discussing

Dr Bernard Heuvelmans shared his love of cryptids with the world and inspired many more scientists to become cryptozoologists

Harrison Hot Springs, British Columbia, Canada, where a group of Sasquatch hunters took these plaster casts of possible Bigfoot tracks



Mermaids are part of category eight of Eberhart's identification system – 'Mythical Animals With A Zoological Basis' – in this case the manatee

cryptids. The portentous Black Shuck hellhound of East Anglia belongs here, as does the Mothman of Point Pleasant, West Virginia, and the infamous Jersey Devil.

Finally, category ten of Eberhart's system deals with 'Known Hoaxes Or Probable Misidentifications'. This group includes various mockumentaries of 'live mermaid footage', in addition to the disappointing Georgia Bigfoot body claims of 2008. Such hoaxes have plagued genuine cryptozoologists from the very beginning, and only work to support the cynical and close-minded critics.

Some of these hoaxes have become as famous as the supposed real cryptids, particularly those from North America where they are collectively known as 'Fearsome Critters'. These crazy creatures include the Agropelter, a mischievous little being that entertains itself by throwing branches at unsuspecting passersby, the Gillygaloo Bird that lays square eggs, and the Hoop Snake, so-called because it bites its own tail in order to make a wheel and roll down hills.

The fake Fiji Mermaid is another infamous 'trick cryptid' that most people are aware of. These fanciful imaginary creatures are mostly designed to entertain but, more often than not, undermine the cryptozoologists' important work and cast a shadow over the veracity of their findings.

Eberhart refused to include ghosts, aliens, fairies, angels or demons since, he believed, they did not rely upon DNA. Other cryptozoologists include such creatures within their own filing system, and have also formed sub-groups such as 'Lake Monsters', 'Terrestrial Cryptids', 'Deep Sea Dwellers' and 'Bipedal Beasts'. While the jury is out on the inclusion of vampires and werewolves, as long as there are cryptozoologists gathering evidence and listening to witness testimonies with open minds, the world's natural – and maybe supernatural – mysteries can continue to be explored and documented.

> "HOAXES HAVE PLAGUED GENUINE CRYPTOZOOLOGISTS FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, AND ONLY WORK TO SUPPORT THE CYNICAL AND CLOSE-MINDED CRITICS"

MONSTER MUSEUMS AROUND THE GLOBE

Why not try one of these monstrous museums?

OGOH-OGOH MUSEUM

Mengwi, Indonesia

A tiny museum filled with enormous statues of the demons and monsters of Bali.

MUSEUM OF THE BEAST OF GÉVAUDAN

Saugues, France

A creepy museum dedicated to the vicious beast that plagued 18th-century France.

YOKAI YASHIKI

Miyoshi, Japan

A museum celebrating local folk monsters.

SKRIMSLASETRIO

Bildudalur, Iceland

Icelandic sea creatures as well as watery cryptids are all explored here.

VIKTOR WYND MUSEUM OF CURIOSITIES

London, England

A museum housing bizarre creatures and artefacts discovered by the Last Tuesday Society, an eccentric group of wealthy explorers.

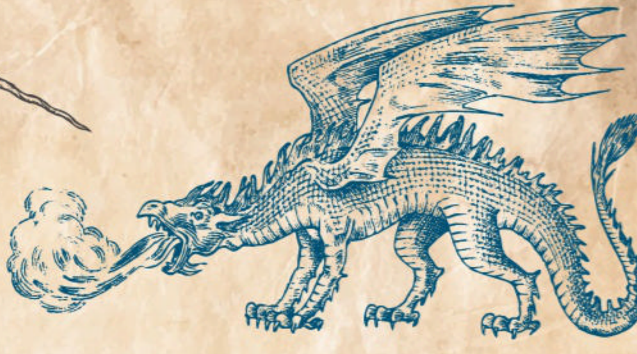
FLATWOODS MONSTER MUSEUM

Sutton, West Virginia

A museum dedicated to the well-dressed, 3m (10ft) tall creature from West Virginia.

The Beast of Gévaudan terrorised French citizens from 1764 to 1770 when it was shot and killed… but was it a monstrous wolf or a werewolf?

Image source: Getty; Alamy; Wiki/United states; Adobe Stock (AI generator)



BEASTS BEYOND BELIEF

Could our ancestors have really encountered the legendary creatures of mythology, or are they just fantastical fabrications?

While cryptozoology is a very modern field of study, humanity's fascination with the natural world and the search for beasts that lurk, or could lurk, within it is nothing new. Cryptozoology bridges the gap between science and superstition, with its roots entangled in mythology and folklore, yet its growth owes thanks to the rise in scientific thought. Until relatively recently, the line between fact and fiction was well and truly blurred. To our ancestors, the beasts and monsters of mythology and legends weren't simply fantastical stories but real creatures, whether they had witnessed them or not.

Cryptozoology vs Mythology

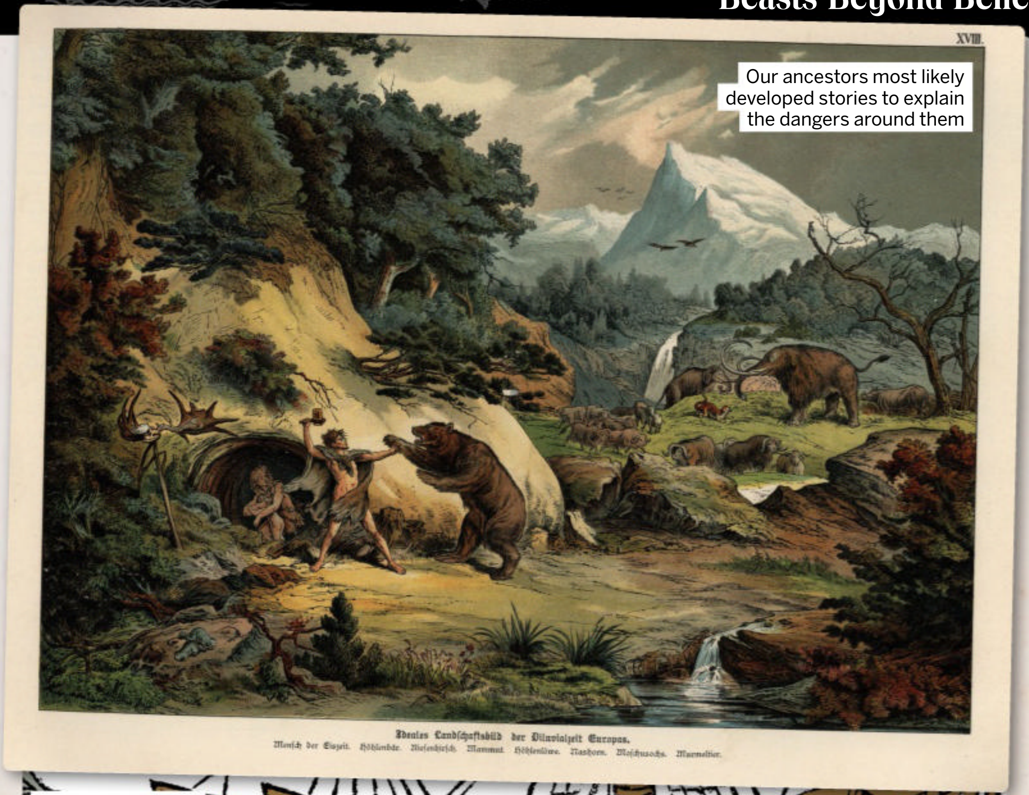
Historically, what we today call cryptids and legendary beasts were one and the same. It is only now, at a time when we have mapped a large portion of the world and found logical explanations that adhere to our current understanding of science, that we can differentiate the two. Cryptids are largely thought to be mythical, but there are eyewitness accounts and grainy photographs that suggest otherwise, leading to an urban legend that is yet to be proven or disproved. Legendary beasts, on the other hand, are assumed to be fabricated. However, throughout history they were seen as real creatures.

Myths, legends and folklore all developed from a mixture of understandings and misunderstandings of what people encountered and experienced. With no real scientific knowledge, our ancestors developed fantastic folklore in the absence of any other rational explanation. Any wonder of science can seem supernatural when you are ignorant of it, and the ancients didn't see their mythical monsters as any less plausible than their cats and dogs.

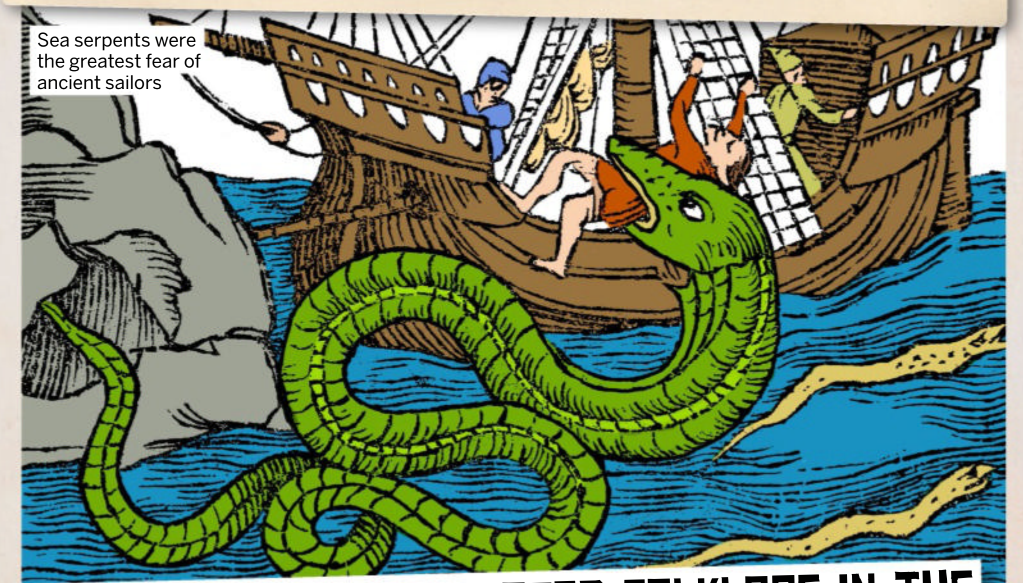
It is believed that a large number of legendary beasts were indeed based on eyewitness encounters that have been distorted thanks to mistranslations, misunderstandings and exaggerations at a time where stories were spread like a game of Chinese whispers. Others grew from more solid evidence – prehistoric fossils of long-extinct creatures. And some legends, the former cryptids (page 30), have been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt to actually exist.

A (Super)natural History

A huge percentage of the Earth was completely unmapped by the Western world for thousands of years, so who knew what savage beasts could be out there? Anyone who did dare venture into uncharted territory discovered all manner of unrestrained exotic monsters beyond their wildest imaginations, the likes of which we had never comprehended, let alone encountered – making it very difficult to relay a description back to their friends.

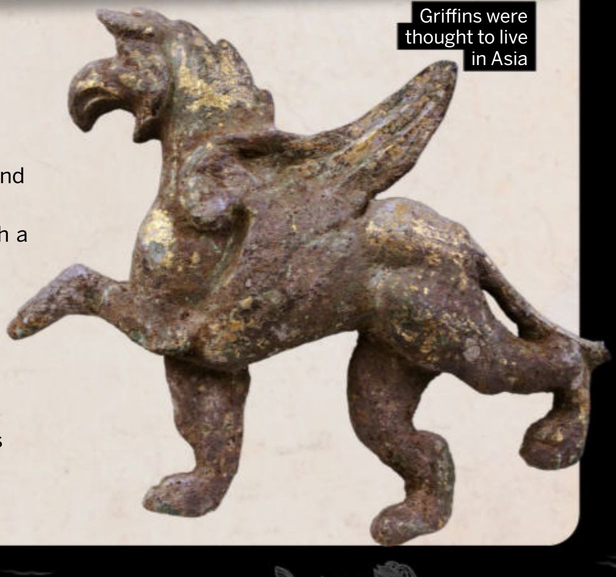

XVIII.
Ideales Landſchaftsbild der Diluvialzeit Europas.
Menſch der Eiszeit. Höhlenbär. Rieſenhirſch. Mammut. Höhlenlöwe. Nashorn. Moſchusochs. Murmeltier.

Our ancestors most likely developed stories to explain the dangers around them



Sea serpents were the greatest fear of ancient sailors

OUR ANCESTORS DEVELOPED FOLKLORE IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY OTHER RATIONAL EXPLANATION



Griffins were thought to live in Asia

Despite their fears, the ancient Greeks ventured into distant lands in the pursuit of knowledge and systematically studied and recorded the natural world in order to gain a better understanding of it. Their innocence and ignorance when it came to science, however, meant natural history's infancy was filled with a hefty dose of conjecture.

Even with all of the ancient Greek and Roman technological advancement, they barely differentiated mythical species from real species. Many beasts we categorise as legendary today, were actually featured in contemporary historical 'factual' accounts as if real. And some of these creatures would

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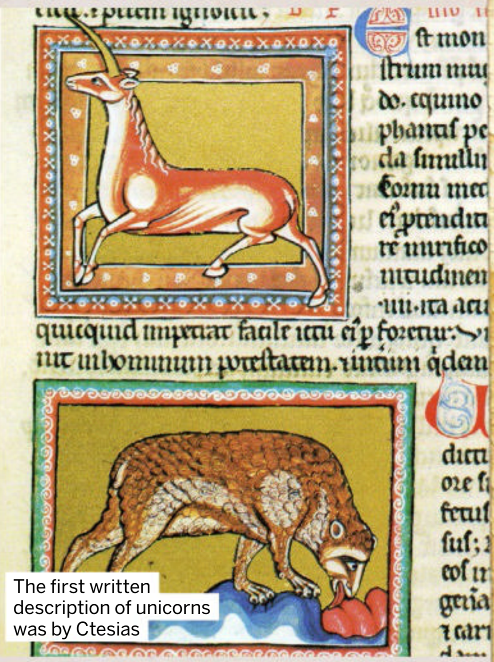
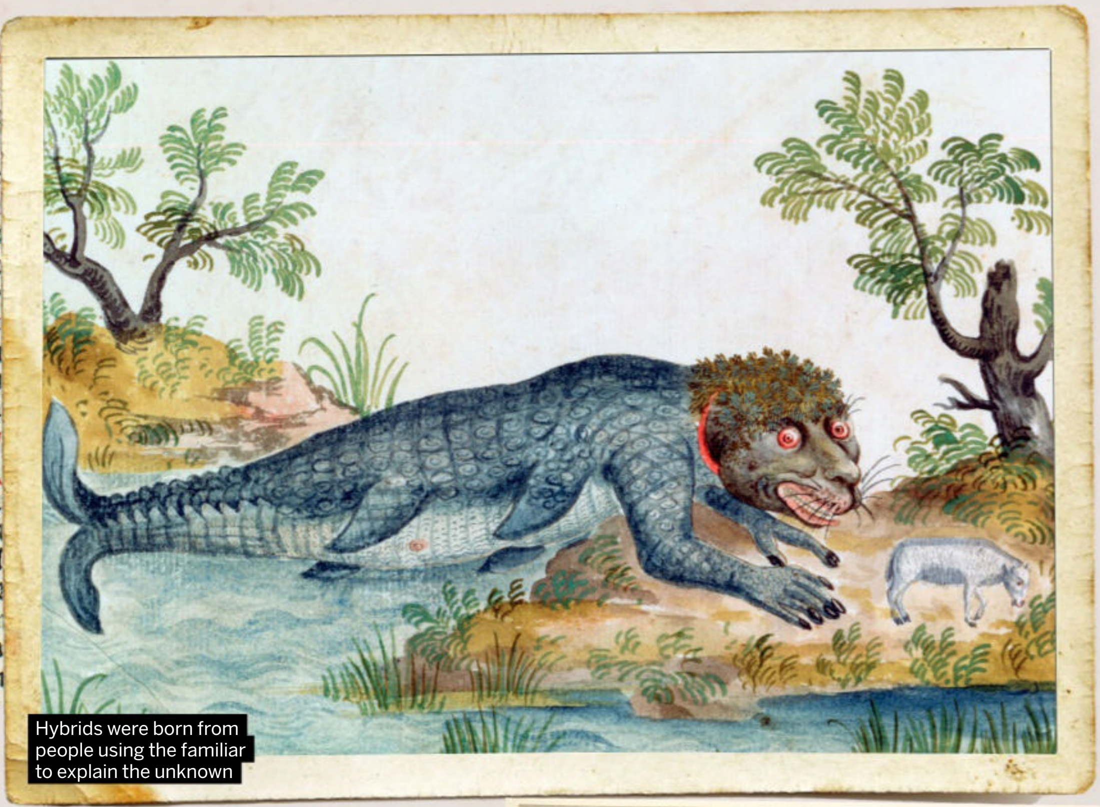


The first written description of unicorns was by Ctesias

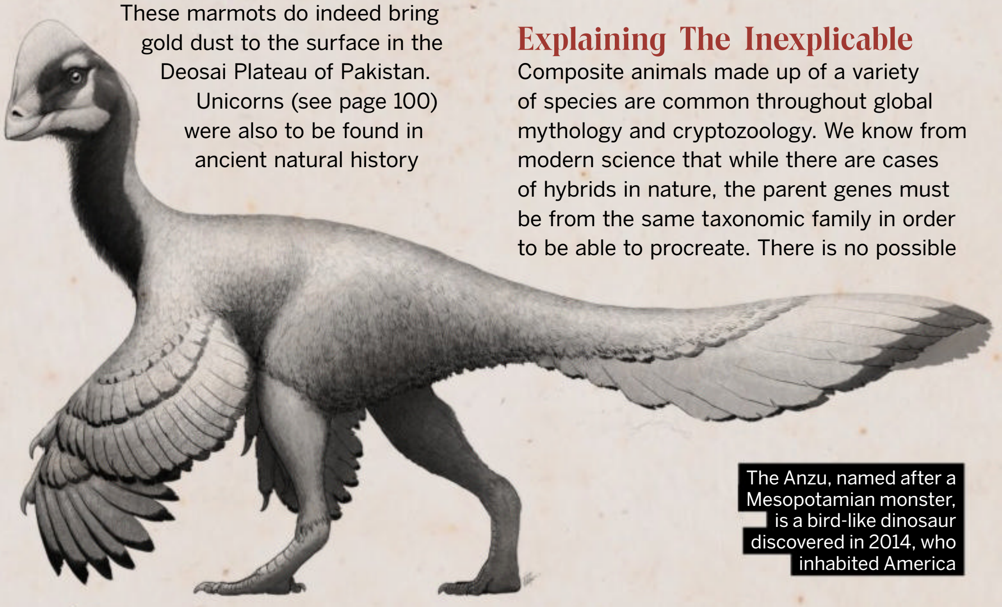


Hybrids were born from people using the familiar to explain the unknown

continue to be believed to be authentic animals until only very recent history.

The writings of ancient Greeks and Romans would be responsible for this apparent misinformation spreading from Classical to Modern times. Herodotus – known as both the 'Father of History' and the 'Father of Lies' – was the first to systematically report what he claimed to have seen or been directly told in order to make a record of his world. Although much of his work was debated in accuracy, with historian Thucydides claiming he made up stories for entertainment, many modern scholars have confirmed a sizable portion of the contents of his work, *Histories.* According to Herodotus, India was home to fox-sized furry ants that burrowed into the sand to reveal gold dust hidden in the desert. However, many believe he simply misheard his information and mistook Himalayan marmots for giant insects. These marmots do indeed bring gold dust to the surface in the Deosai Plateau of Pakistan.

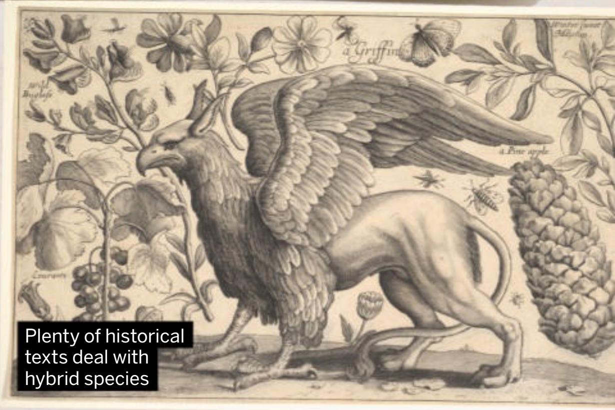
Unicorns (see page 100) were also to be found in ancient natural history books. The earliest written descriptions of unicorns are by historian and physician Ctesias. The philosopher, Aristotle, reiterated Ctesias' account in his influential *Historia Animalium.* This was later copied again by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* along with another Indian native – a fierce monoceros, a beast with the head of a stag, the feet of an elephant, the body of a horse and the tail of a boar, with a single large black horn protruding from its forehead. Many believe the animal they were struggling to describe was the Indian rhinoceros and they were confusing attributes and misinterpreting other eyewitness accounts. The way in which we describe newly discovered creatures gives credence to the belief in the 'hybrid' beasts of legend.



The Anzu, named after a Mesopotamian monster, is a bird-like dinosaur discovered in 2014, who inhabited America

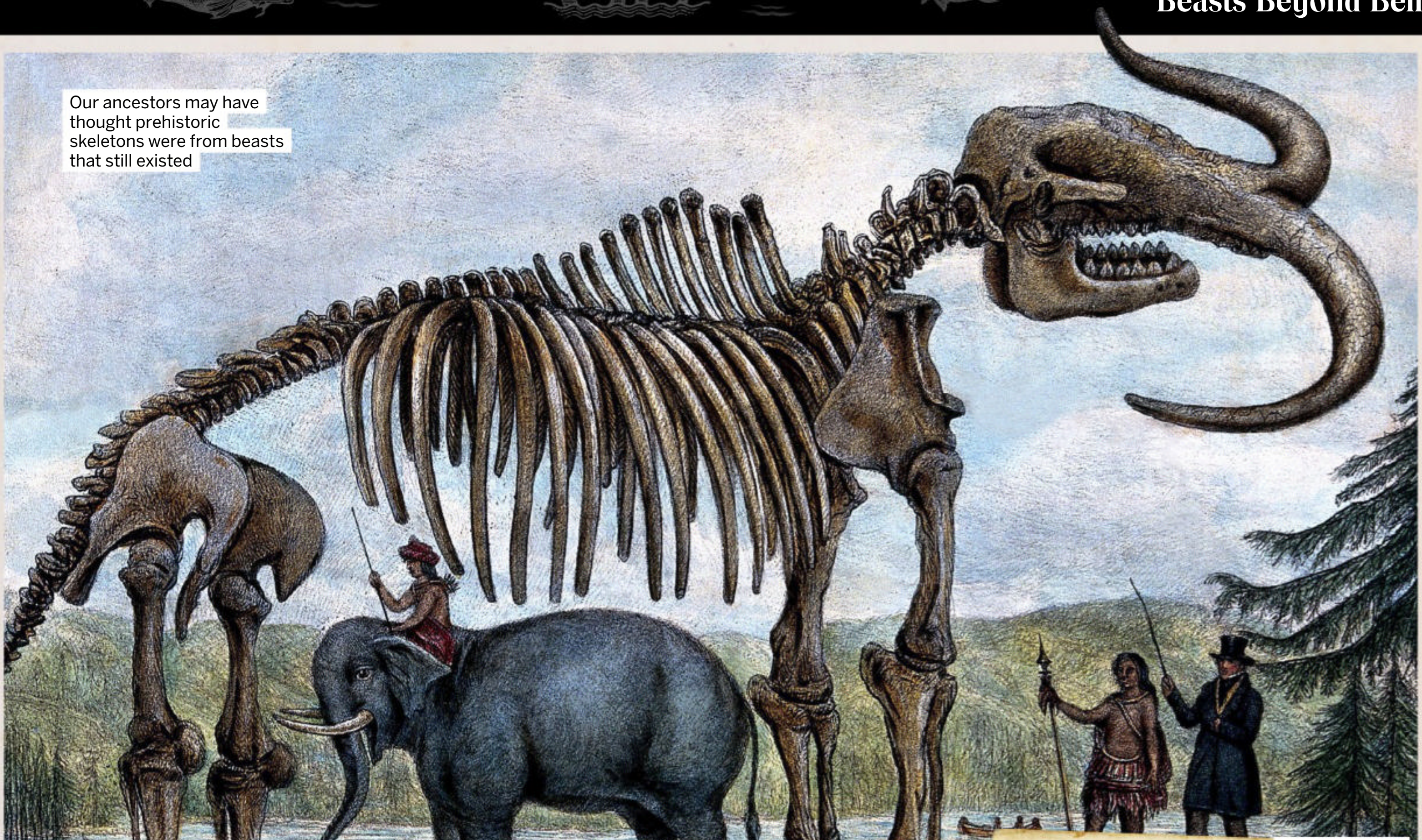
Explaining The Inexplicable

Composite animals made up of a variety of species are common throughout global mythology and cryptozoology. We know from modern science that while there are cases of hybrids in nature, the parent genes must be from the same taxonomic family in order to be able to procreate. There is no possible way that a human could mate with a goat or a lion with an eagle. That said, how things look might not always be the reality, and just because a creature appears to be forged from a mix of known species, they may not even be remotely genetically related to either. We describe things by what we already know, and all these mythical beasts are comprised of, at least anatomically, aspects of creatures we knew and know exist or existed. This makes it all the more believable that they are simply a literal rendition of a description of an animal conveyed in the only way the witness knew how – by comparing it to a species known to them.

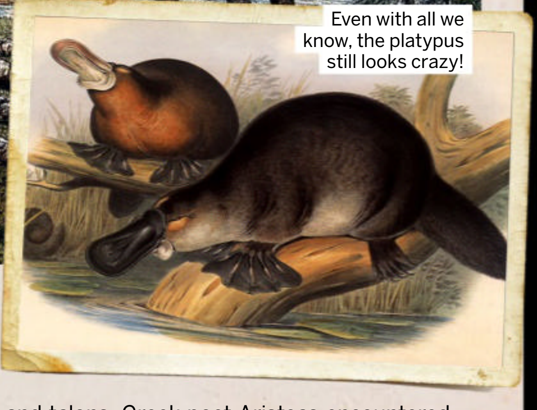


Plenty of historical texts deal with hybrid species

And it wasn't just the Romans and the Greeks who reported bizarre sightings of what they described as hybrids between two entirely unlikely animals. Many animals are initially described as a mixture of different species, and often earn their scientific names in reference to this. When Europeans ventured to Australia they encountered some absolute abominations of nature. In 1499, one explorer encountered



Our ancestors may have thought prehistoric skeletons were from beasts that still existed



Even with all we know, the platypus still looks crazy!

MANY ANIMALS ARE INITIALLY DESCRIBED AS A MIXTURE OF SPECIES, AND OFTEN EARN THEIR SCIENTIFIC NAMES IN REFERENCE TO THIS

what he could only describe as a gigantic man-fox hybrid with a monkey's tail – and it's easy to see why the kangaroo was so baffling. These marsupials often stand taller than a human male, upright, on their back legs, and feature piercing front-facing predatory eyes. But, stranger than the kangaroo was the duck-billed, webbed footed, beaver-tailed, otter-bodied, venomous, egg-laying, milk-feeding atrocity, the platypus. When artist depictions and descriptions of this bizarre animal were sent to Europe at the turn of the 19th century, many thought it a hoax like the Fiji mermaid (page 41). But, it was no hoax.

Fossil Folklore

Aside from basing our entire understanding of natural history on misinterpreted, secondhand oral and written accounts, there's plenty of compelling physical evidence for mythical beasts too. The Greeks and Romans travelled extensively, expanding their empire both West and East and glimpsed the fossils of long-extinct creatures visible in the landscapes across the Mediterranean and Asia. There would be no reason not to believe that these preserved skeletal remains of prehistoric mammals and dinosaurs were not the corpses of animals still alive and breathing, and so it is likely they fuelled the rumours of the existence of numerous legendary beasts.

Another mythical beast that Pliny the Elder claimed inhabited Asia was the Griffin, a hybrid with a lion's torso, tail and legs and an eagle's beak – sometimes its entire head – wings and talons. Greek poet Aristeas encountered Scythian nomads in the Gobi deserts who told stories of great battles with lion-sized beasts with curved beaks in the pursuit of gold in Issedonia (now Central Asia), Near Eastern cultures have been depicting the creatures since at least 3000 BCE and later myth claimed the beasts deposited agate rocks in their nests alongside their eggs – a clue pointing to their stoney origins. As late as the 13th century, the nearby Chinese spoke of skeletal remains they referred to as "dragon bones" in former Issedonian lands and feared entering them. It is likely that these myths were influenced by the fossilised remains of the Protoceratops and the Psittacosaurus dinosaurs, the skeletons of which were discovered in Mongolia and the Gobi Desert

The platypus or Ornithorhynchus anatinus ('duck-like bird-snout') is often suspected as the evolutionary missing link between reptiles and mammals

© Wiki Commons, Getty Images

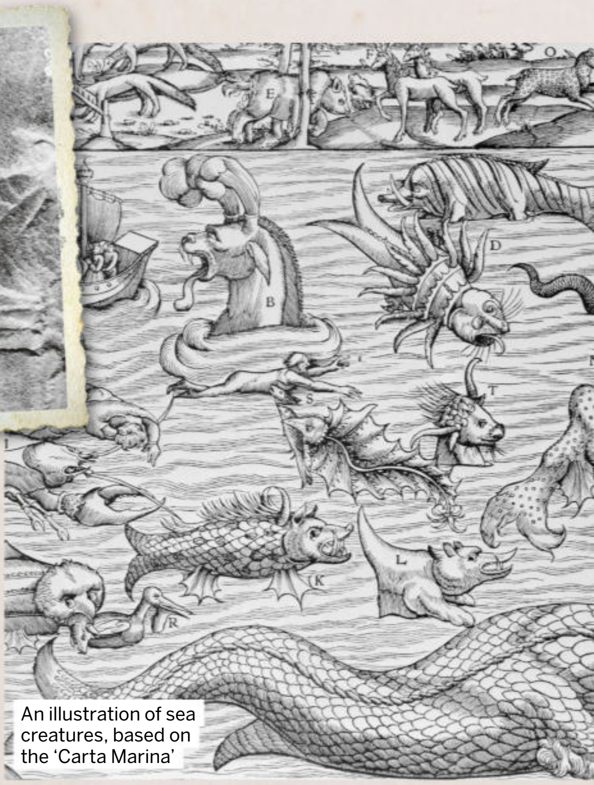
in 1922 by American naturalist, Roy Chapman Andrews, and both of which could grow to lion size and feature prominent beaks. From these skeletons, people deciphered what they interpreted the creature would look like, using their knowledge of existing animals. Whether these dinosaurs survived to come into contact with humans, however, is unlikely. The modern hypothesis that a large number of dinosaurs had feathers does make you wonder, though!

The existence of giants is a common belief throughout world mythology. Everyone from the ancient Greeks and Carthaginans to the Norse, the Tlaxcalteca, the Aztecs and the North American natives believed in giants – they are even found in the Bible. Enlarging any being immediately emphasises its power, superiority and, of course, threat – leading to most cultures seeing gigantic creatures as monstrous. However, there is another common thread throughout mythology – the idea that giant creatures were our predecessors to the Earth, which turns out is true – megafauna, or gigantic mammals, roamed the Earth during the Pleistocene period.

Early humans would have encountered some of these massive creatures, so the legacy of them may have been passed down through centuries by word of mouth and archeological evidence. Skeletal remains of mammoths are thought to have influenced the idea of a prehistoric race of giants, and mammoths and elephant bones are suggested to have inspired the one-eyed Cyclops, due to the nasal cavity of their skull appearing to be one large eye socket.

In China, the fossilised footprints of Theropod dinosaurs were assumed to be made by massive chickens, or were sometimes considered the tracks of dragons. Similar dragonic, serpent-like creatures are common in almost every culture's folklore across the globe, all featuring a various number of limbs and with or without wings, and they all very likely have their origins in the fossils of extinct marine reptile species. Bizarrely though, the 16th-century Austrian statue of such a creature, known as a Lindworm, found in Klagenfurt, was actually modelled on the skull of a woolly rhinoceros and not a sea serpent at all. The fossilised skull was found in a quarry in 1335 and the Lindworm's head has been credited as the earliest reconstruction of an extinct animal.

Dinosaur footprints were often thought to have belonged to dragons


An illustration of sea creatures, based on the 'Carta Marina'

The 240 million year old snake-like aquatic reptile, the Dinocephalosaurus orientalis, is believed to have been the most likely inspiration for the Chinese dragon

Once Upon A Time In America

The Americas were once home to numerous gigantic creatures that all left their mark on the land. Mastodon, giant ground sloths and glyptodonts (giant armadillos) are all known to have roamed the continents, including numerous gigantic winged and feathered bird-like dinosaurs such as the Bambiraptor and Anzu (named for a mythological Mespotamian bird-lion monster hybrid) and flying reptilian Pterosaurs, the most complete skeleton of which was discovered in Dinosaur Provincial Park Alberta, Canada.

Teratorns, extinct gigantic birds of prey, are also known to have populated both North and South America. Stories of gigantic Thunderbirds are prevalent in the myths of numerous North American indigenous cultures. Another common tale is that of the monster buffalo, likely referring to the modern bison's ancestor, Bison antiquus, who was 15-20 per cent taller than its modern counterpart.

In Mexico, the Tlaxcalteca people also spoke of monstrous birds, gigantic lizards and enormous sea creatures, supported by the presence of actual fossils that reflect the mythical beasts found within the region. Ground sloths were thought to have been hunted to extinction, but along with fossil discoveries of the creature, there are still reports of sightings across South America, notably in Patagonia and the Amazon Basin, and it is thought that the Brazilian cryptid, the Mapinguari, may simply be one of these surviving gigantic sloths.

Maps would often include illustrations of sea monsters
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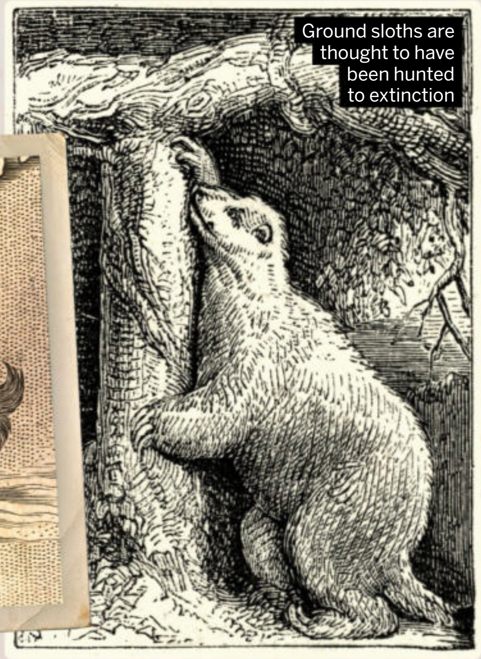
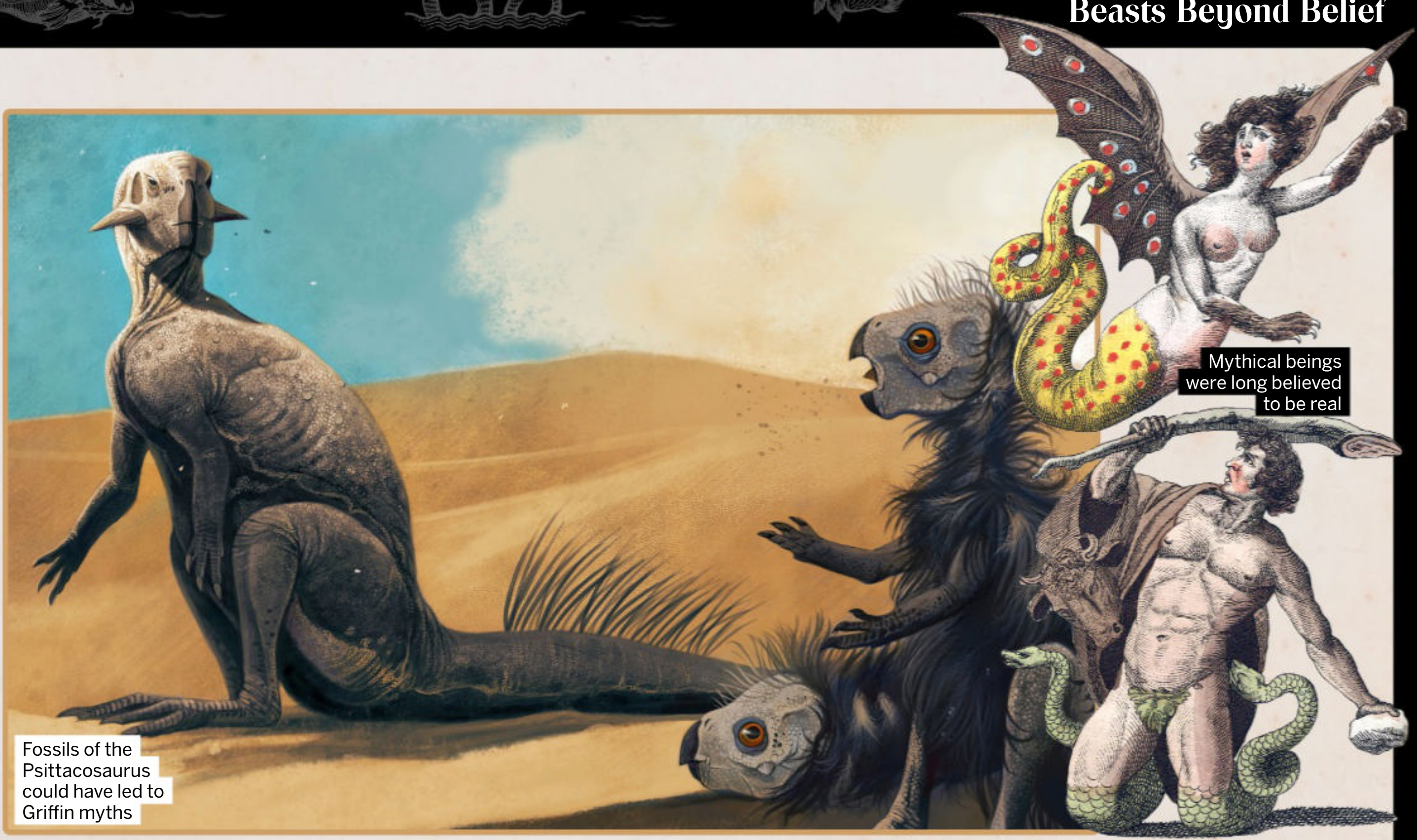

Ground sloths are thought to have been hunted to extinction

Animal Allegories

During the Middle Ages, there was very little differentiation between fact and fiction, with the Church influencing every aspect of what little schooling was available. During this time, educational encyclopedias known as *Bestiaries*, based on the writings of Classical texts such as Aristotle's *Historia Animalium* and the works of Pliny the Elder, Herodetus and more, became popular in Britain and France. These illuminated

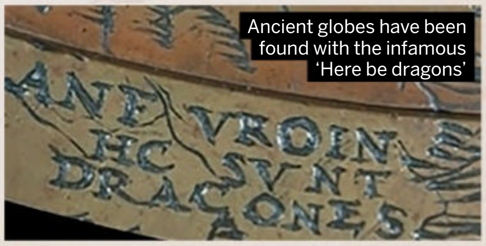


Fossils of the Psittacosaurus could have led to Griffin myths

Mythical beings were long believed to be real

compendiums of beasts provided an artist's rendition and observational descriptions of various animals, both real and imaginary, side by side. The descriptions sought to reflect the Christian belief that the natural world itself was a manifestation of the divine, and as such each beast had its own spiritual meaning, but also give an insight into the characteristics and behaviours they observed in each animal, and how they still attributed magical aspects to both the existing animals and legendary beasts. All animals had meanings in the ancient and medieval worlds, even the mundane ones. Our ancestors believed that the natural world was intrinsically linked to the divine, and it wasn't just legendary creatures who were worshipped and associated with magical powers and paranormal abilities, animals we know for certain exist were attributed supernatural traits. Birds were prophetic and often believed to be harbingers of death or messengers to another world by numerous cultures. In ancient Egypt, cats were revered as gods and they have continued to be seen as sacred in Islam as well as associated with magic in the West.

So if real species were also attributed supernatural gifts, perhaps there lies some truth hidden within the fantasy entities we are today so convinced are pure fiction? In the 16th century, Conrad Gessner attempted to decipher the fact from the fiction and create the first modern zoological work with his *Historia Animalium*, in which he orders the animals alphabetically and describes all the creatures known to exist. Interestingly, despite his thorough research and knowledge of fakery – curiosities being sold such as Jenny Hanivers, dried ray or skate carcasses manipulated to look like fantasy creatures – he included the unicorn and the sea-centaur (a man-horse-fish hybrid of Greek mythology). Early 'monster' maps of the world were commonly illustrated with the most fearsome creatures reportedly witnessed by sailors at sea, warning intrepid travellers to beware of the potential perils that they may encounter at that location. Olaus Magnus's 1539 'Carta Marina' features a polypus (many-footed) creature described as an octopus in its text but illustrated as a lobster on the map, showing how little people knew and understood about the natural world. A few globes have been discovered from the era that feature the now infamous inscription HC SVNT DRACONES (Here be dragons) indicating unknown territories, but the more common phrase used by medieval cartographers was HIC SVNT LEONES (Here are lions).



Ancient globes have been found with the infamous 'Here be dragons'

ALL ANIMALS HAD MEANINGS IN THE ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL WORLDS, EVEN MUNDANE ONES

The Truth Is Out There

Thousands of unknown species are discovered every year, and we know that there's still so much to uncover about the universe. There's a reason we still have faith in religion, believe in paranormal abilities, search for ghosts and look up to the skies for UFOs. Scientists are continuing to push the boundaries of what we understand of the laws of physics, and we are forever learning more about our own biology, evolution and genetics. Our learning will never stop, and neither will our fascination with the unknown – but whether or not we will ever truly understand the inner workings and mysteries of our world remains to be seen. What's more, before the advent of science and technology, and the rise of the importance of physical evidence and preserving our past, many artefacts were lost or destroyed before modern archeologists and scientists had a chance to witness them. If there were limited populations of mythical species, it is likely that any evidence we discovered, that isn't still deep in the ground, would have been destroyed or damaged and couldn't therefore be analysed today. Does this mean certain creatures did exist? Of course not. But there will always remain a small possibility that unicorns once frolicked across India or that a small population of ground sloths are still enjoying an undisturbed existence in the Amazon…

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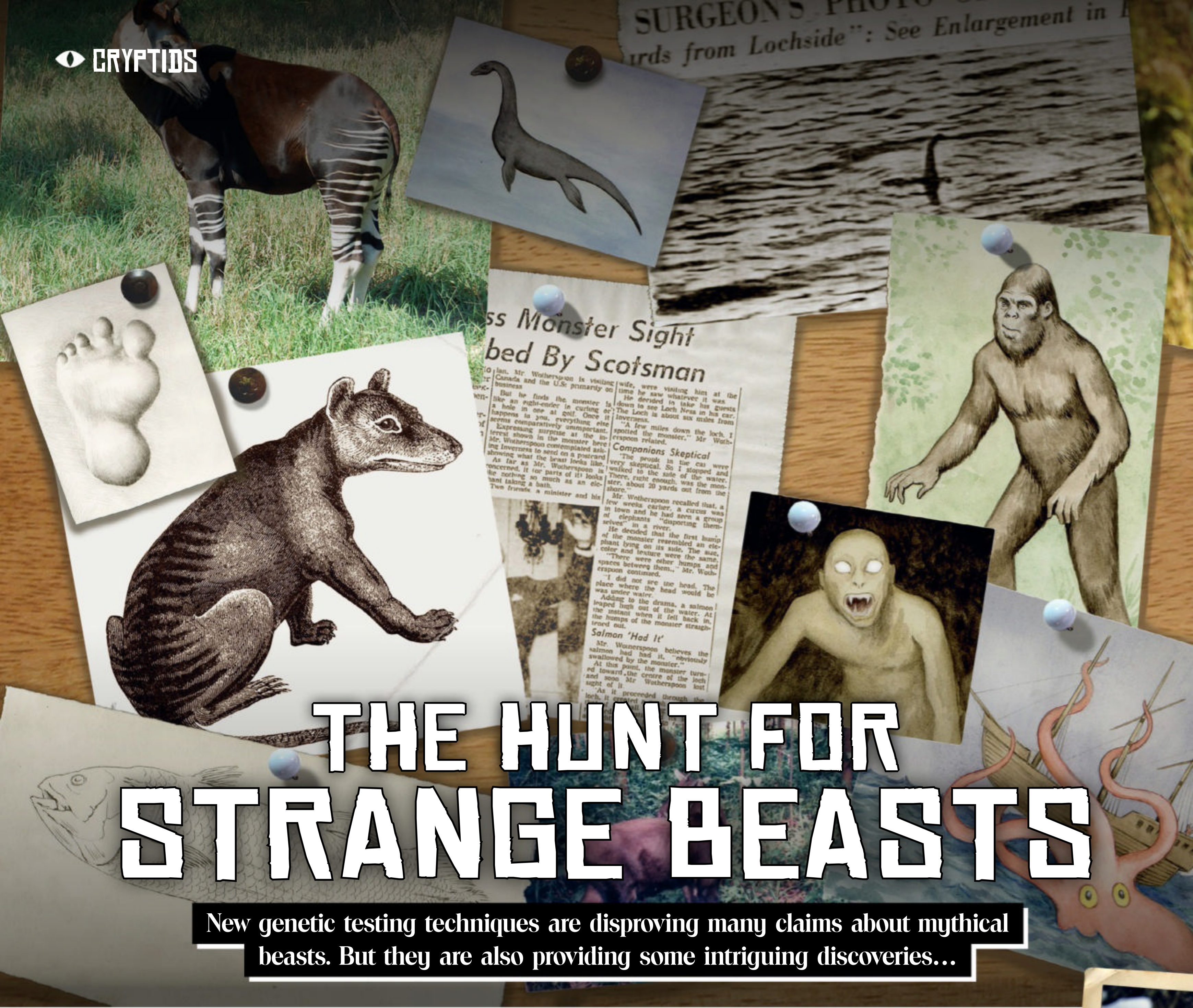


THE HUNT FOR STRANGE BEASTS

New genetic testing techniques are disproving many claims about mythical beasts. But they are also providing some intriguing discoveries…

According to the controversial field of cryptozoology, the world might still be full of large, strange beasts that await scientific recognition. Known as cryptids, these creatures include sea serpents, giant primates such as Bigfoot and the Yeti, and surviving dinosaurs in the Congo. While people dedicated to cryptozoology continue to collect anecdotes of these elusive beasts in the same way they have done for centuries, now is a crunch time for their field. New genetic testing techniques are enabling samples of hair, droppings and tissue – said to be evidence of cryptids' existence – to be put to the test. Some of these genetic tests have confirmed expectations – that these creatures are merely figments of people's imagination. But other results are truly surprising.

In February 2013, a team led by Dr Melba Ketchum of Texas-based company DNA Diagnostics, claimed in a paper published in the journal *DeNovo* that they had found Bigfoot DNA at numerous sites across North America. According to the team, Bigfoot is not only real, but it has a mixture of DNA – from a mysterious unknown organism and modern humans. After making their stunning announcement, the team proposed that humans and this unknown organism must have interbred roughly 13,000 years ago.

These results were so surprising that other geneticists immediately took a close look at the team's data. They found numerous problems – the biggest being that the 'Bigfoot' samples appear to contain a jumble of DNA from several animals, including bears, opossums and humans. They say that contamination and poor genetic sequencing best explain the results. Ketchum continues to stand by her results, but it's safe to say that they have not exactly been accepted with open arms by other researchers.

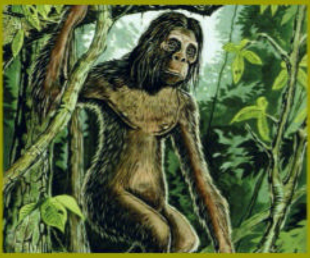
Another study devoted to mystery primates was led by Dr Bryan Sykes, Professor of Human Genetics at the University of Oxford. In 1989, Sykes and colleagues were the first scientists to extract DNA from fossil bone – that of a Neanderthal. Curious about so-called mystery creatures, he amassed a collection of genetic samples over the years said to be from Bigfoot, Yeti and

Scientists estimate 86% of species are undiscovered. This includes as many as 91% of the creatures that exist within our planet's oceans

Brown bears interbreeding with polar bears thousands of years ago is one theory behind 'Yeti' DNA samples

5 MOST WANTED CRYPTIDS

Cryptozoologists advocate the existence of an extraordinary number of mystery beasts. The majority are known from a handful of anecdotes and there is no good reason to think that their discovery is likely. However, a lesser number are taken seriously by an especially large number of people, some qualified zoologists among them. These, then, can be regarded as the 'most wanted' of cryptids.



ORANG PENDEK

This red- or brown-haired primate is said to resemble an orangutan but have more human-like proportions. Unique to Sumatra, it's been seen by reliable witnesses and occurs in a densely forested habitat. Some researchers have suggested a link with the supposedly extinct Homo floresiensis.

Likelihood of existence ●●●○○

THE LOCH NESS MONSTER

Reported repeatedly since the 1930s, with observations leading to theories it might be a plesiosaur, long-necked seal or giant newt.

Likelihood of existence ●○○○○

BIGFOOT

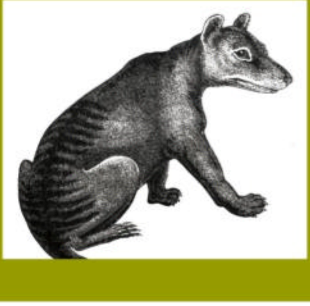
Also known as Sasquatch, this iconic cryptid has been reported across North America. Differences in reports have led to speculations about distinct species or subspecies. Despite a huge number of claimed sightings, all photo, footprint casts, and DNA evidence presented so far has proved to be either bogus or inconclusive.

Likelihood of existence ●●○○○

YETI

This creature of the Himalayas is reported as a giant ape. However, any sightings are most likely to be bears or other known mammals.

Likelihood of existence ●○○○○



THYLACINE OR TASMANIAN TIGER

A dog-shaped marsupial with a striped back, the thylacine officially died out in 1936. However, sightings continue across Tasmania and Australia. Could it really persist in remote regions? It seems unlikely. Sightings are likely hoaxes, or mistaken glimpses of dogs or foxes.

Likelihood of existence ●●○○○

TECHNIQUES FOR ANALYSING DNA ARE NOW SO HONED THAT SCIENTISTS CAN TELL IF AN ANIMAL WAS PRESENT FROM ENVIRONMENTAL TRACES

Dr Bryan Sykes carried out DNA analysis on samples purportedly from cryptids such as Yeti

the Bigfoot-like 'Almasty Of The Caucasus'. The results? All of the submitted Bigfoot samples were from bears, porcupines and other familiar mammals. Another blow for cryptozoologists. The Almasty samples, meanwhile, turned out to be from nothing more exotic than cows, horses and bears.

North Pole Link

But Sykes's results did present one surprise. Two of the Yeti samples – one from India and another from Bhutan – were from bears most closely related to ancient polar bears. Since polar bears do not inhabit those areas, the best interpretation is that a population of unusual brown bears live in the region, the descendants of an interbreeding between polar bears and brown bears that took place thousands of years ago. In short, this new data seems to show that yet-to-be-discovered bears are behind the myth, not unknown giant primates, which is exciting nonetheless.

It's not just genetic analysis that's shedding new light on strange beasts that roam the countryside. Early in 2013, a team of geneticists and other scientists led by Max Blake, a PhD student at Aberystwyth University in Wales, set about studying a lynx specimen from 1903 that formed part of the collection at the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

People have been saying for decades that exotic cats might be lurking in the British countryside. In fact, these sightings have been a constant presence since at least the early 1900s. The hypothesis favoured by some is that exotic cat species have escaped from private and public collections – circuses, menageries and zoos – resulting in the countryside being constantly restocked with these animals. So could the 1903 lynx specimen shed some light on this idea?

Blake and his fellow researchers took hair and bone samples from the lynx. Attempts to extract DNA at Durham University's Ancient DNA Laboratory proved completely fruitless, presumably because the specimen had, in the intervening 110 years, been treated with chemicals that had broken down its DNA. But traces of the radioactive element strontium, extracted from the cat's bones, proved to be more insightful, showing it had spent most of its life either in Canada or the in Dartmoor region of Devon.

One form, or 'isotope', of strontium, 87strontium, varies in its proportions relative to a more stable form, 86strontium, according to the chemistry and age of the rocks in a location. It means that these ratios – absorbed by an animal's tissues during its life – provide a strong indication of where the creature spent most of its life.

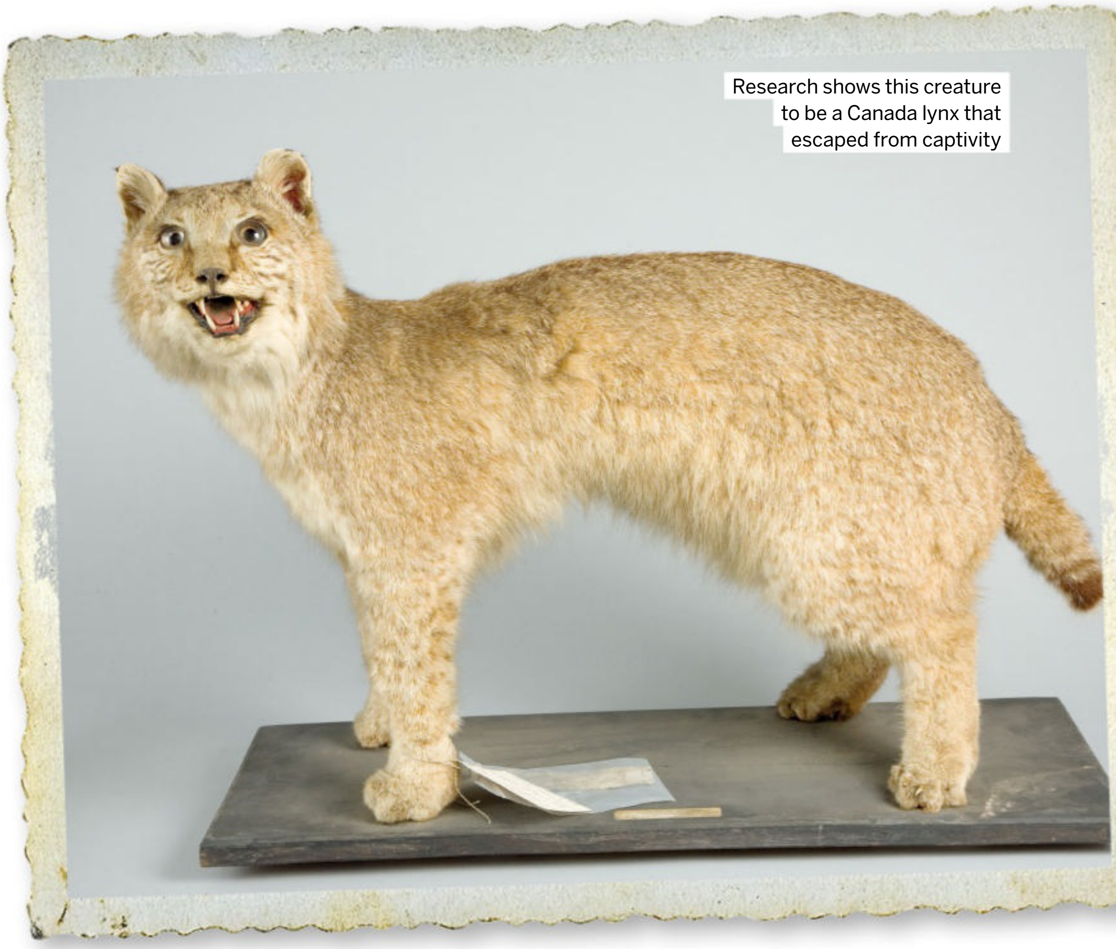
The analysis didn't end there. Close inspection of its teeth revealed there was a build-up of hard plaque, which is more typical of an animal that had spent most of its lifetime in captivity. Meanwhile, an analysis of the dimensions of its skull helped to show what species of lynx it was.

The conclusion? It was a recently escaped lynx – most likely a Canada lynx – that had been in captivity for most of its life. In other words, the research supports the idea that

DISCOVERED!

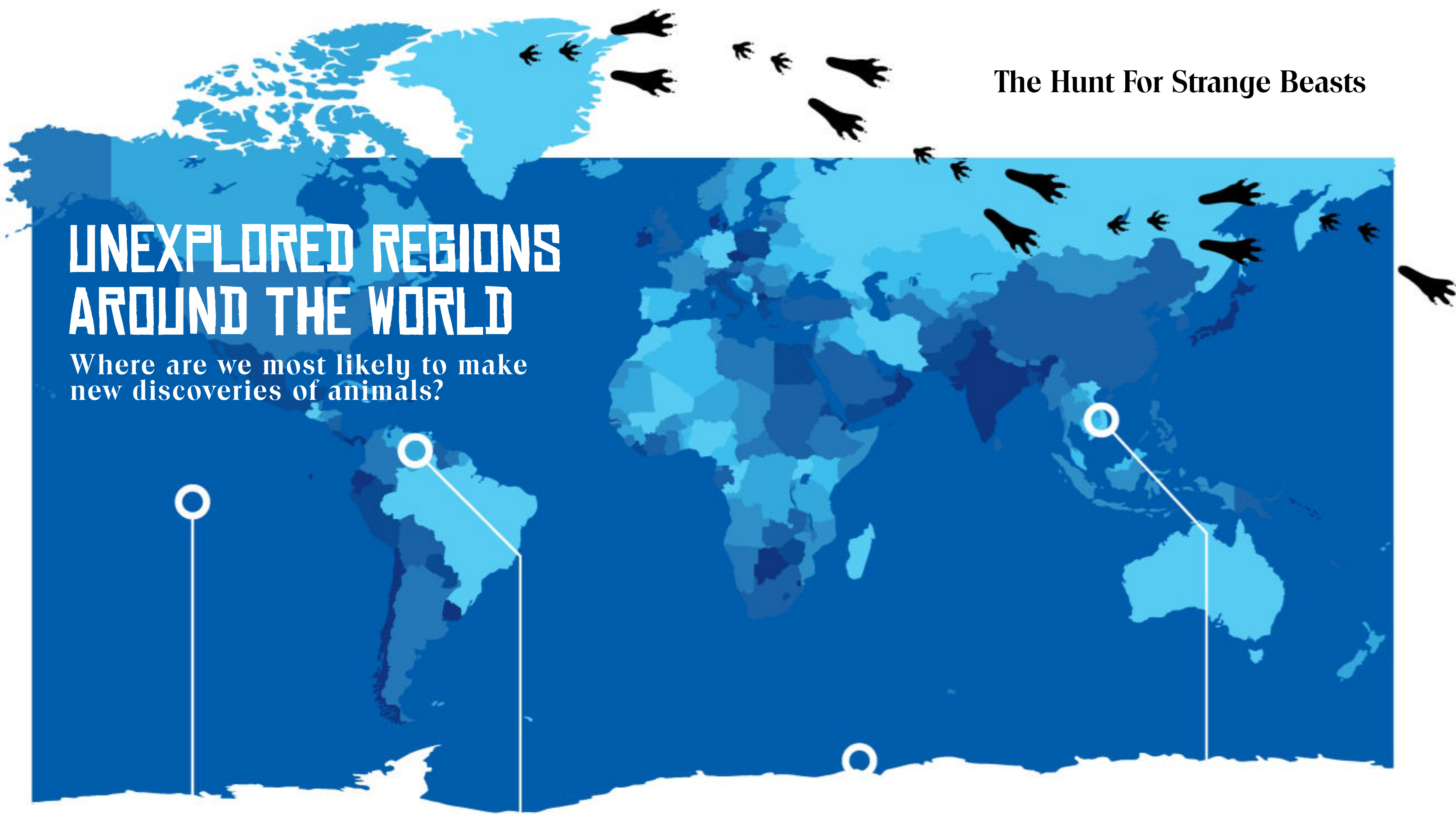
The DNA database that helps research

Sequencing DNA from hairs, feathers, skin and bones is now vital to determining whether a sample belongs to an as-yet undiscovered mythical beast. This research has been made easier by GenBank, a gigantic online resource of genetic data. Initiated in 1982, it currently contains the genetic codes of more than 500,000 formally described species – ideal for checking samples found in the field. Its use will continue to grow as the database doubles in size every 15-18 months.


Research shows this creature to be a Canada lynx that escaped from captivity

UNEXPLORED REGIONS AROUND THE WORLD

Where are we most likely to make new discoveries of animals?



MARIANA TRENCH

Located in the western Pacific, this is the deepest part of the world's oceans and is little explored. The chances are high that large animals, including new sharks, fish and squid, await discovery here and in other deep-sea locations.

VENEZUELA

The Sierra de Maigualida region covers over 11,600km2 (4,479mi2) and has been described as 'almost unexplored'. Clothed in forest, it has yielded a large number of peculiar, unique plants in recent years. New animals are almost certainly inhabiting the region.

ANTARCTIC

The interior is generally only surveyed by aircraft, and ice-free valleys, mountain ranges and giant lakes add complexity to this gigantic continent. While it is unlikely that large animals await discovery, it's highly plausible that smaller animals have yet to be found here.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

This remains a hotspot for the discovery of large mammals and other animals, with the forested, often mountainous regions of Vietnam, Laos and Indonesia remaining poorly known. New hoofed mammal species have been discovered here since the 1990s.

exotic cats do roam the countryside and are escapees from captivity – and that they have probably been doing so in Britain since the early 1900s.

Going Forward, Looking Back

The future is likely to hold more insights into mythical creatures. Techniques for extracting and identifying DNA have now been honed to such a degree that scientists can determine whether an animal was present simply from the traces it leaves in its environment – a few droppings, even saliva and skin cells, are sufficient. In this 'sight-unseen' detection method, a small quantity of soil or water is collected from the habitat suspected to be occupied by a target animal. It's then analysed in labs, with the scientists looking for traces of environmental DNA (eDNA).

In 2012, analysis of eDNA in 500 millilitres (17.5 fluid ounces) of seawater collected off the coast of Denmark revealed the presence of 15 fish species – including a few rare vagrants. The DNA traces most likely came from skin and scales, mucus and gut cells in faeces. In the same year, analysis of another sample of seawater – this time collected from the Baltic Sea – found eDNA from long-finned pilot whales. This species is reported occasionally in the region but generally thought to be an extremely rare visitor.

The very idea that people might search for these tiny traces of environmental DNA is brand new, and its potential for cryptozoology can't be underestimated. It might show us that a species once considered extinct is actually alive and well, or provide evidence that previously unknown species exist. Either way, the coming years will be an interesting time. Watch this space.

Environmental DNA from long-finned pilot whales has been found in the Baltic Sea

ARE CRYPTIDS JUST A MEME?

These strange beasts may just be ideas handed through generations

Folklorists and sceptics argue that cryptids are products of tradition and psychology – they are ideas or 'memes' that get passed through generations. Modern ideas about lake or sea monsters, for example, evolved from myths when far less was known about the world. This was explored by Michel Meurger and Claude Gagnon in *Lake Monster Traditions: A Cross-Cultural Analysis*. Lake monsters, they argued, are linked to beliefs that lakes are bottomless and do not give up their dead. These have only recently been interpreted as descriptions of real monsters.

Image source: Getty; Alamy; Wiki

MONSTER MYTHS BUSTE

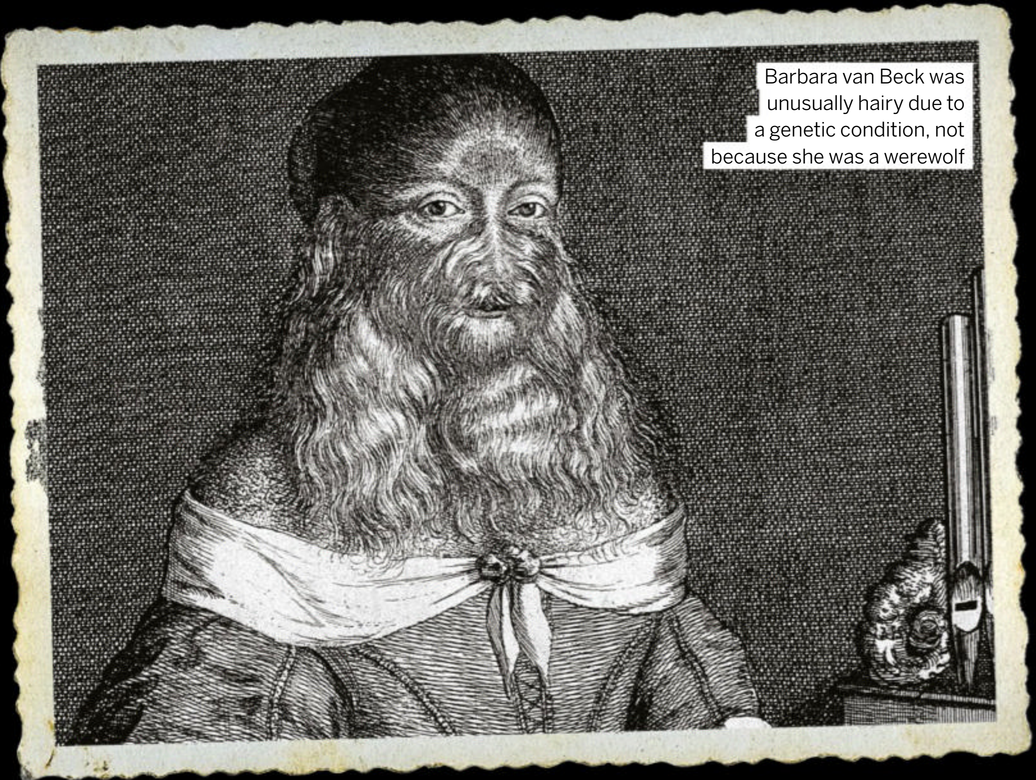
Folklore tells us that terrifying creatures such as Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster lurk on the outskirts of civilisation. But can science explain the harrowing historic encounters humans have had with them?

The human brain is hard-wired to make sense of the world around it. When events occur that we can't explain with logic, fear often takes over and our imaginations run riot. In ancient times, ships that became lost at sea must have been attacked by sea monsters, fossilised bones were thought to have belonged to ferocious mystical beasts and natural disasters were the acts of evil spirits.

Over the last thousand years or so of recorded history worldwide, people have conjured up their own explanations for frightful sightings with little or no scientific process. This information was spread through stories and over time, through their telling and retelling down generations, the more fantastic details became exaggerated. Before long, large communities shared a common fear of the colossal creatures that hid beneath their local lakes or the bloodthirsty beasts that only revealed themselves at night. But even some relatively new myths of younger civilisations still have traction.

How can science start to debunk monster myths that have endured millennia to separate a genuine sighting from a misconception or hoax? Much of the long-standing belief in mythical monsters is justified in the minds of the believers by the fact that there are no photographs for proof, or the photos cannot be explained. When powerful and misunderstood forces are at play, monster-believers state that the absence of evidence can't be classed as evidence of absence.

Only recently have video cameras, radar, infrared imaging and deep-sea exploration been able to provide answers to the world's most famous monster mysteries. The study of animals that may or may not exist is called cryptozoology: those who specialise in this may hold the best chance of discovering evidence of new species or debunking long-held myths.



Barbara van Beck was unusually hairy due to a genetic condition, not because she was a werewolf

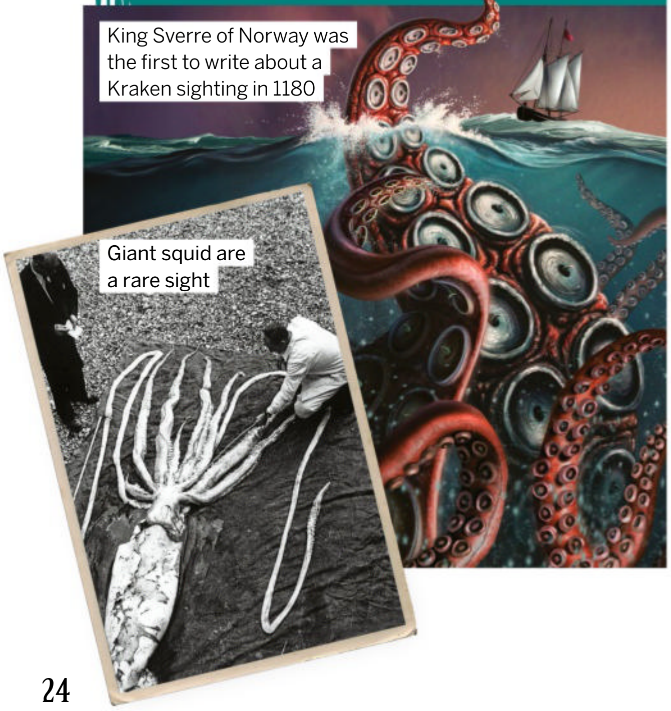
© Alamy / Getty / Shutterstock

ATTACK OF THE KRAKEN

Some tales of this Nordic sea monster describe it as the size of an island. With giant, tentacle-like extensions, the Kraken appears under ships, making the water appear shallow and brown, and is capable of attacking any large vessel that may cross its path. Since the 1100s, many sailors have told stories of their encounters with a Kraken in the seas of Iceland, Greenland and Norway. It became known as a beast that could swallow any ship in the giant whirlpool it whipped the sea surrounding it into. The earliest references to the Kraken date back to 1180, and it has since been considered the largest monster ever imagined by humankind. But was it really imagined?

EXPLANATION

The creature that sailors called a Kraken was likely to have evolved from sightings of a real animal that can grow up to 13 metres (43 feet) in length and weigh one tonne. It has eight arms for manipulating objects in the sea and two even longer tentacles with hooks to keep hold of its prey. However, this is no monster: the marine creature described in folklore is likely to have been an imaginative recollection of a giant squid sighting. Giant squid spend most of their time deep in the ocean, so a sighting is rare. But when ancient seafarers set their eyes on one of these beasts, they would return to shore with dynamic tales of the danger they assumed they were in. With each exaggerated retelling, every giant squid that came to the surface for a peek was restyled as an ocean brute.



King Sverre of Norway was the first to write about a Kraken sighting in 1180

Giant squid are a rare sight

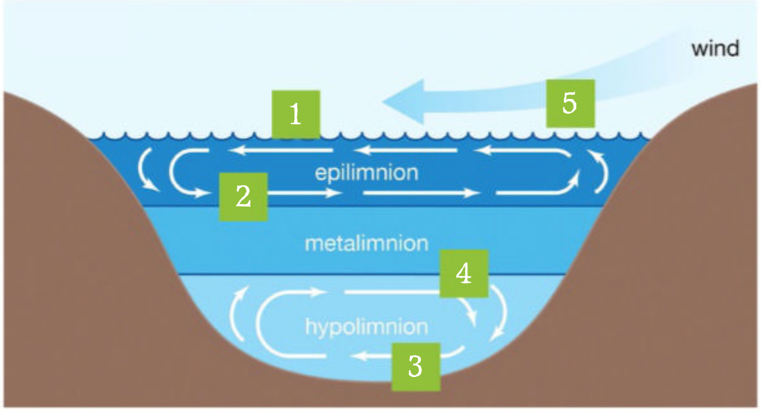
Ogopogo was originally called N'ha-a-itk and was the protector of the valley

THE ILLUSIVE OGOPOGO

Fringed by sandy beaches, the calm surroundings of Okanagan Lake in Canada doesn't immediately appear to be a setting for monstrous activity. But 16 per cent of British Columbians believe there's a creature lurking below the lake's surface. This creature is Ogopogo (see page 122), and before it became a mythical beast, the creature was a sacred spirit.

The Indigenous community of Okanagan Lake believed that Ogopogo was a spirit that took the form of an aquatic serpent. The Okanagan people told the story of the lake monster for thousands of years. When Europeans settled in the area in the 1800s, they also became aware of the tale of Ogopogo and the sightings and stories began to increase. Photographic evidence of Ogopogo has so far consisted of dark, suspicious-looking shapes near the surface of the water.

EXPLANATION



A WAVE FROM THE DEEP

A phenomenon called thermal stratification could be to blame

1 SURFACE HEATING

As the Sun shines on Okanagan Lake during summer, the surface layer is heated up.

2 EPILIMNION

When the upper layer of water is heated, it becomes less dense than the cold water below. This prevents it from sinking to the bottom of the lake.

3 HYPOLIMNION

The bottom layer of the lake doesn't get access to sunlight and keeps getting colder, increasing its density and layer separation throughout summer.

4 HOLDING SEPARATION

The water in each layer circulates in confinement until autumn arrives, when the upper layer cools to make the density differences weaker.

5 A MONSTER WAVE

When the layers are returned to similar temperatures, water at the bottom can rise to the top in what is called a lake turnover. Unusually large waves will form at the surface as dark, serpent-like shapes.

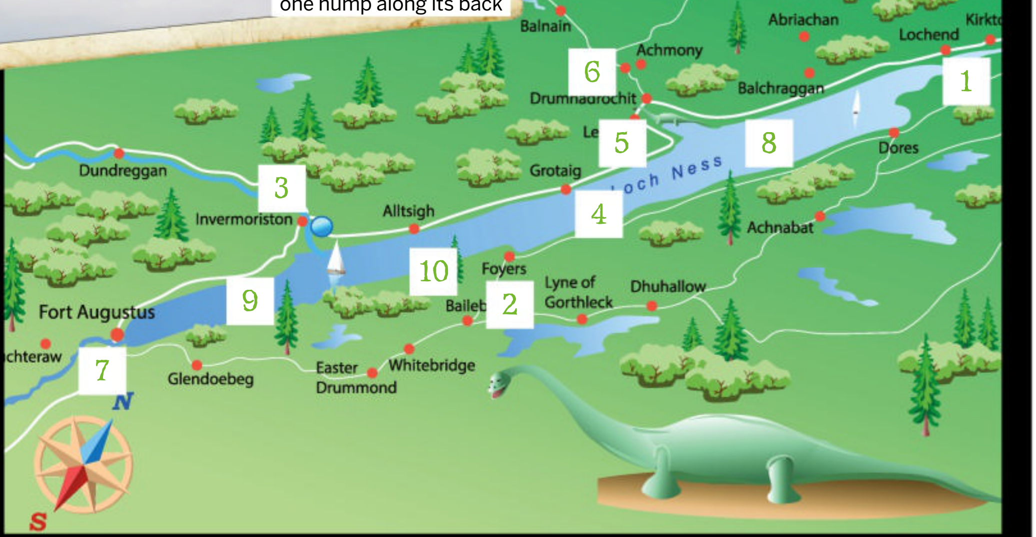
THE LOCH NESS MONSTER

For over 1,500 years, there have been claims of a large aquatic creature with a long, rippling body living in Scotland's Loch Ness. It's known as the Loch Ness Monster, or by its nickname, Nessie (page 116). The loch is 35 kilometres (22 miles) in length, almost three kilometres (1.8 miles) in width and has a volume of 7.1 cubic kilometres (1.7 cubic miles), making it the largest volume of fresh water in Britain. It can be found in the Scottish Highlands near the city of Inverness. Despite there being over 1,100 reported sightings of Nessie, searching the loch's waters is made difficult due to the murky water caused by peat being washed into Loch Ness from the surrounding hills.

Saint Columba made the earliest known reference to the monster in 565 CE. In the missionary's account, a monster was attacking people in the lake. Instead of fleeing the scene, Saint Columba is said to have saved the locals by commanding the monster to "go back with all speed". Later sightings of Nessie in the 1900s were much more tame and usually involved a glimpse of a dark or scaly curved back. The monster is now famous worldwide and attracts half a million tourists to the loch annually. The world remains divided on the existence of Nessie, with great speculation around what the sightings could be and rewards offered to anyone who can prove its existence.

The Loch Ness Monster is described as having a long neck and at least one hump along its back

EXPLANATION


Balnain
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Invermoriston
Achnabat
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Foyers
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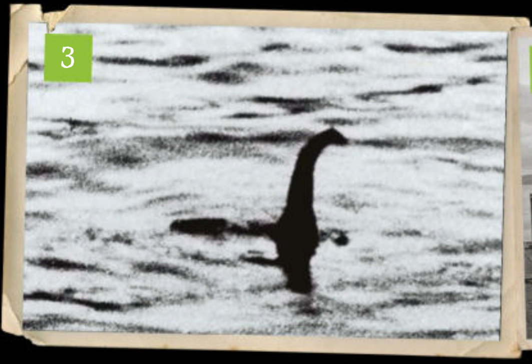

5
HEADQUARTERS
LOCH NESS
EXPEDITION

NESSIE SIGHTINGS

Much of the 'evidence' of this aquatic monster has been debunked

1 565 CE
The River Ness was the site of Saint Columba's sighting. Historians suspect the story was made up.

2 1933
The first photo of Nessie was taken by Hugh Gray. This is thought to be a rolling otter.

3 1934
The 'surgeon's photograph', printed in the *Daily Mail* newspaper, was a hoax. A toy submarine and piece of wood were made to look like Nessie.

4 1954
Fishing boat Rival III followed a large object that kept pace with it for 800m (0.5mi). This sonar reading was later linked to an algal bloom.

5 1962
The Loch Ness Investigation (LNI) group was founded to examine the loch and analyse sightings

6 1972
The LNI captured a flipper. One LNI member has since confirmed that photos of the loch were enhanced to produce these shapes.

7 1984
Steven Whittle tried to catch the monster in a cage that measured 18m (59ft) in length. The trap remained in the loch for a month but caught nothing.

8 2003
The BBC sponsored a large-scale search of the loch with 600 sonar beams and satellite technology.

9 2019
Eel DNA was detected in the loch by scientists, who theorised that sightings were of giant eels.

10 2023
The biggest search since the 1970s took place in August, involving volunteers from all around the world. No evidence was found.

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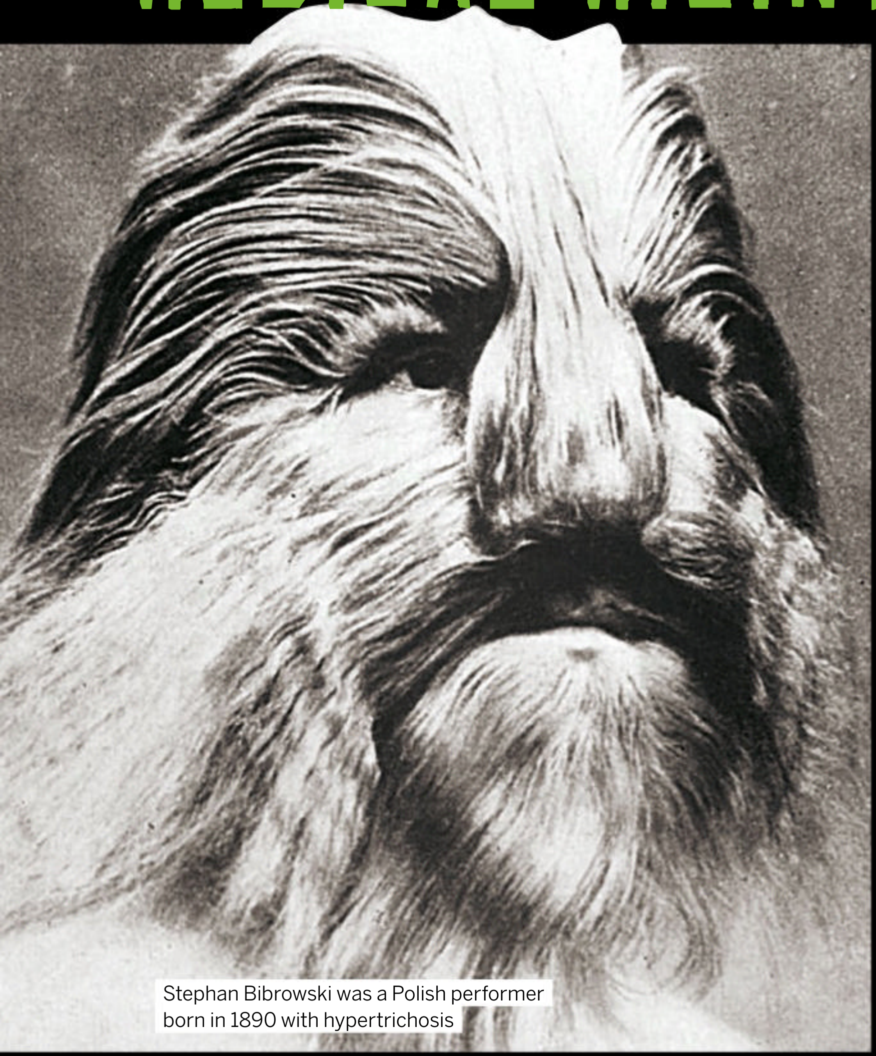
MEDICAL MISINTERPRETATIONS



Stephan Bibrowski was a Polish performer born in 1890 with hypertrichosis

WHERE WEREWOLVES CAME FROM

Perhaps the most unnerving aspect of werewolf (page 82) folklore is that the 'monster' could be anyone. Disguised as a regular human during the daylight hours, these beasts transform at night – both physically and mentally – into vicious, body-devouring wolfpeople. Curated by alterations through the telling of word-of-mouth stories in European folklore, a werewolf will feast on any animal, human or dead body, and just one bite from this creature can turn another person into a werewolf.

A WEREWOLF WILL FEAST ON ANY ANIMAL, HUMAN OR DEAD BODY

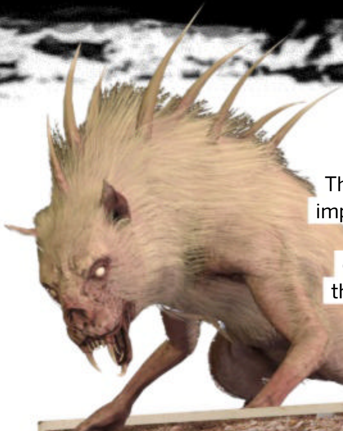
EXPLANATION

Ancient tales tend to originate from true encounters, and some elements of the werewolf myth could be misinterpreted medical conditions. One that may have shaped the werewolf legend is hypertrichosis. Since the Middle Ages there have only been around 50 people in the world confirmed to have this condition, caused by a mutation in chromosome 17. People with hypertrichosis produce excessive hair across their entire body. Before medical science made sense of it, people with the condition were treated as if they were animals and people spread stories based on their limited understanding.

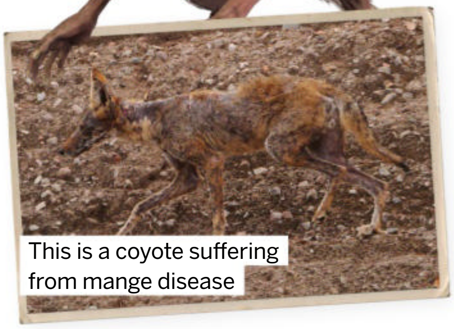
Werewolf folklore was also likely inspired by rabies, a disease contracted from the bite of an infected animal. Untreated rabies makes both dogs and humans act aggressively. This could have made its way into the myths of werewolves.

GOAT-SUCKER CHUPACABRA

In 1995 in Puerto Rico, the first Chupacabras (see page 91) were reported. These ghastly animals are said to roam the countryside on four legs, hunting for vulnerable livestock – sheep, goats and similar domestic animals. But when farmers discovered the dead bodies, they saw that the flesh of their livestock was left uneaten; instead this monster feasted on their blood. This is where their Spanish name comes from: 'chupar' means 'to suck' in Spanish, while 'cabra' translates to 'goat'. They are described as being hairless, canine-like creatures with crazy red eyes and spines on their back.



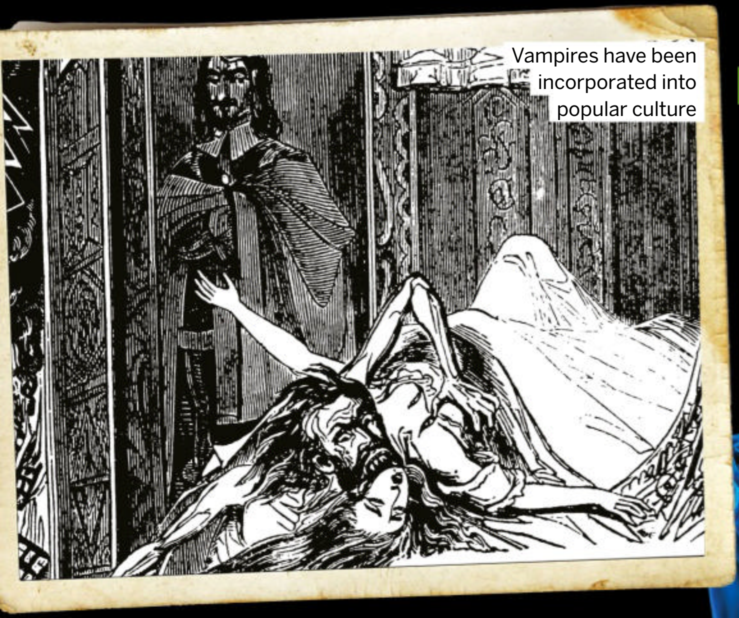
This is an artist's impression based on common descriptions of the Chupacabra



This is a coyote suffering from mange disease

EXPLANATION

Around the beginning of 2010, supposed Chupacabra specimens were handed into the authorities. Upon inspection, biologists found that almost all of these predators were coyotes. But coyotes are a recognisable species, so shouldn't be mistaken for a supernatural beast. However, the biologists surmised that a skin disease called mange gave them their monster-like appearance and habits. This is caused by a mite that burrows into the skin, causing infection, discomfort and hair loss. They lose the energy to hunt and are forced to prey on easier targets, like domestic livestock. Although the wild canines' pained movements make them easily mistaken for monsters, it's the work of miniscule parasites that really makes the skin crawl.


Vampires have been incorporated into popular culture

VAMPIRIC ORIGINS

Biting their victims with a sharp set of fangs, vampires are only after one thing: human blood. These undead villains are said to search for their next blood meal at night, while the living sleep in their beds. Vampires avoid sunlight (they are typically portrayed with pale skin) and garlic, which is a powerful antibiotic. Many Eastern Europeans who believed in these creatures thought the origin of the vampire was a disease in the blood, so coming into contact with garlic could harm or kill a vampire. Modern movies still incorporate garlic as a deterrent for the helpless targets of vampire attacks. Many traits of vampires, which were conjured up in medieval Eastern European tales, have been traced back to a disease called porphyria.

EXPLANATION

PORPHYRIA HYSTERIA

The symptoms of this disease have inspired ancient myths and pop-culture crazes

1 PALE-FACED

People with porphyria have less of the protein heme in the blood. This results in fewer red blood cells, which reduces the colour in a person's skin.

2 INNOCENT FANGS

Patients' gums begin to recede to expose their teeth. This makes the teeth appear longer, which could be mistaken for fangs.

3 GARLIC REPULSION

Sulphur can bring on intense pain in porphyria sufferers. As garlic is high in sulphur, people with the disease usually avoid it.

4 BLOOD-RED URINE

The pigment that would usually be used to make red blood cells is passed out of the body, giving urine a dark-reddish colouring. In the 17th and 18th centuries, people thought porphyria patients had been drinking blood.

5 SUN SENSITIVITY

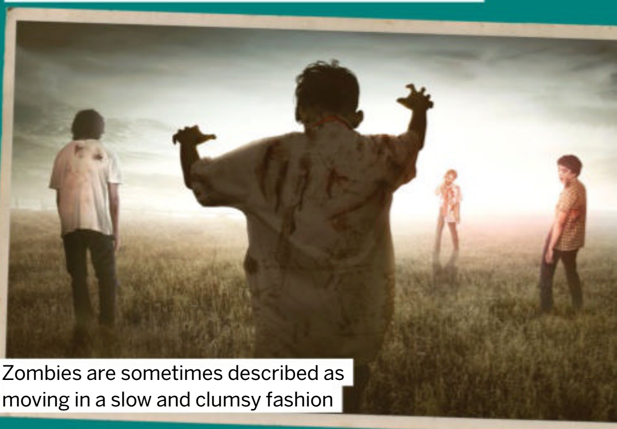
As people with the disease can't convert the required organic compounds into haemoglobin, it builds up in the body. A buildup of porphyrin causes light sensitivity.

THE UNDEAD AMONG US

Studies show that around half of the population have a fear of death. Going from life to death symbolises the end of everything we're familiar with. Zombies take the phobia of death to the next level by taking on the form of 'living' corpses. They become animated and move as if they're still alive. These monsters have a craving for human flesh, which may already be rotting in their own bodies. What makes zombie folklore even more terrifying is the difficulty of destroying a creature that's already dead. They can't be killed using conventional methods. Instead their heads need to be completely removed to prevent any connection between body and brain.

EXPLANATION

Different cultures around the world initiated the idea of people returning to life. Although zombie myths vary across the globe, there's a common theme of partial resurrection that historians think was imagined to confront the fear of what happens at the end of life. These monsters portray the worst outcome for many people – that is, to not have rest in the afterlife. Those who first believed in the existence of zombies may have observed the release of gases from a body shortly after death. As bacteria feed on the dead tissue, methane and ammonia are released into the body, causing bloating. This natural biological process makes the body's skin move in a way that could be interpreted as it coming back to life. Others who claimed to have seen people return from the dead may have seen a premature burial. Before the 20th century, doctors would often test to confirm death merely by prodding and poking. This led to incidents where people would be banging on the inside of their coffins in a panic at their own funeral.


Zombies are sometimes described as moving in a slow and clumsy fashion

© Alamy / Getty

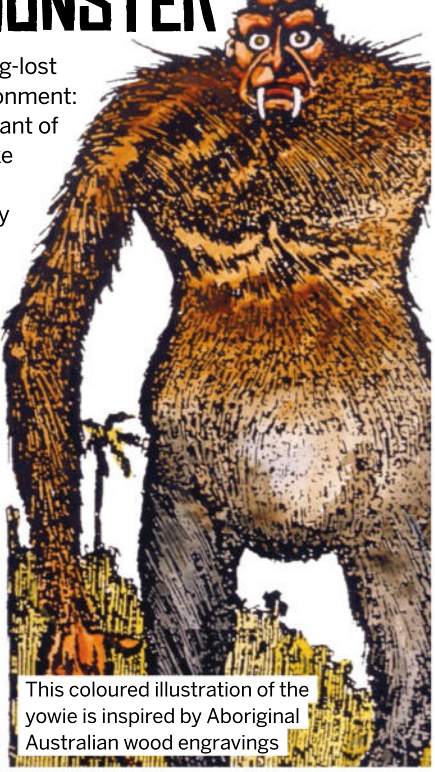
HUGE, HAIRY HUMANOIDS

AUSTRALIA'S BUSH MONSTER

The Yowie (page 53) can be thought of as the Yeti's long-lost cousin, though living in a completely contrasting environment: in Aboriginal Australian folklore, the Yowie is an inhabitant of the hot and dry Australian outback. The shaggy ape-like creature is around twice as tall as an average human adult, with much larger feet, bat-like ears, a huge toothy mouth and a flat nose. Some say that the Yowie is an aggressive monster, while others say it's simply a friendly giant.

EXPLANATION

The Kuku Yalanji tribe of Far North Queensland were first to claim the existence of the Yowie. This species lived alongside them, according to legend, and there were two types of Yowie. One grew up to three metres (9.8 feet) in height and the other about half this size. Ancient cave art supports this, but evolutionary biologists think that it was an early hominid species that's now extinct. Yowie may also have come from 'yuwi', the dream spirit in the Yuwaalaraay language of northern New South Wales, or 'yahoo', the name of an evil spirit. Spirits are a core part of Aboriginal Australian beliefs and can appear in a variety of forms.



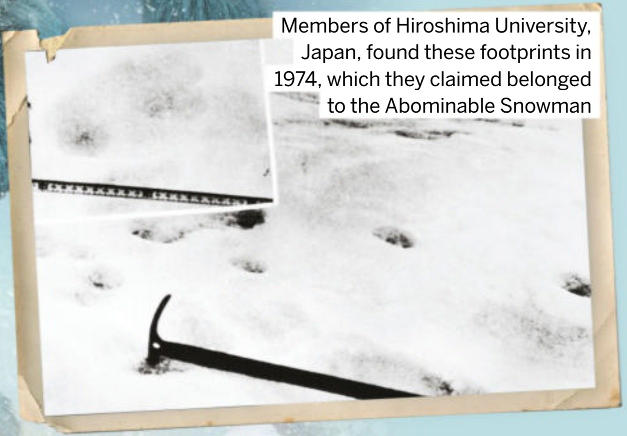
This coloured illustration of the yowie is inspired by Aboriginal Australian wood engravings

THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

In 1921, when English journalist Henry Newman first heard of a 'wild man of the snows' that inhabited the mountains of the Himalayas, he described his learnings in his next article. In his writing he called the creature 'the Abominable Snowman' (more on page 56) and these words played a crucial role in the interpretation of huge footprints found on Mount Everest.

EXPLANATION

No Abominable Snowman has ever been captured, but what was believed to be Yeti remains – such as hair, bones and teeth – was held in Nepalese monasteries. In 2017, DNA from nine of these samples was analysed by scientists at the State University of New York. Eight of the nine DNA samples proved to be from bear species – Asian black, Himalayan brown and Tibetan brown bears – and one was from a dog.



Members of Hiroshima University, Japan, found these footprints in 1974, which they claimed belonged to the Abominable Snowman

AAAHH!!! REAL MONSTERS

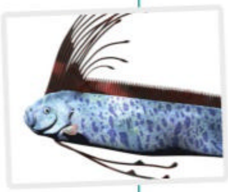
5 mythical creatures proven real (more on page 30!)

1 GIANT SQUID

Reports of giant squid were made for over 2,000 years before scientists were able to verify their existence.

2 OARFISH

These fish can be up to 17m (56ft) in length. No live oarfish had been filmed until 2001. Before this, they were mistaken for sea serpents.

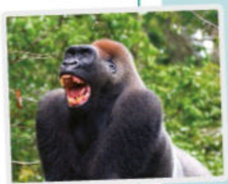


3 KOMODO DRAGON

Komodo dragons were confirmed to be real in 1910. Before this, large lizards were believed to be long extinct.

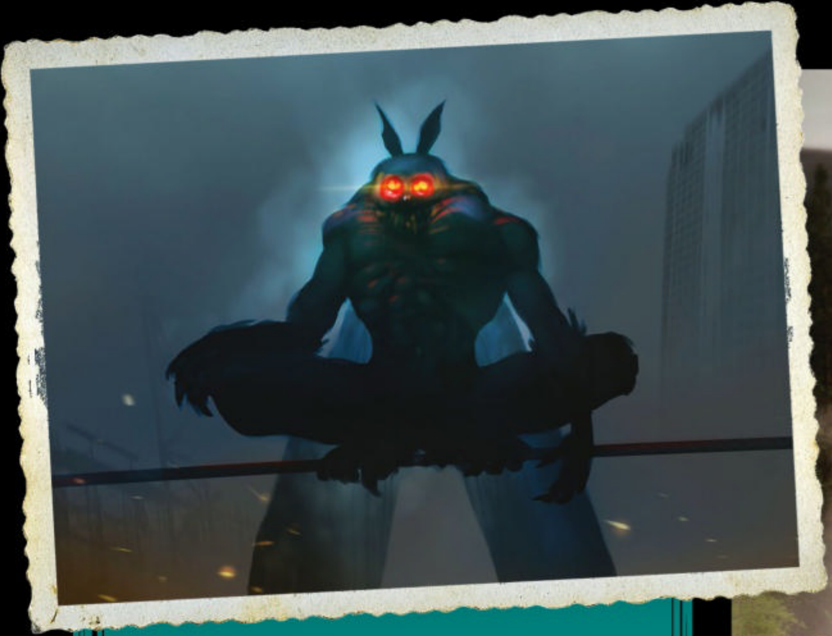
4 GORILLA

Until 1847, gorillas were classified as 'monster-like humans' who would ransack villages. Gorillas were officially classed as a species in 1902.



5 PLATYPUS

With an otter's feet, a beaver's tail and a duck's bill, scientists first thought the animal was pieced together using other animal



HALF MAN, HALF MOTH

So far we've met the monsters of the land and sea, but beings that haunt the minds of humans can be found as far as people can see… or imagine. The Mothman (page 60) is a monster of the skies, with its body the size of a fully grown person, its wings measuring around three metres (ten feet) and possessing menacing luminous red eyes. The Mothman was first witnessed in the winter of 1966 at a graveyard in West Virginia.

EXPLANATION

There have been multiple sightings of the Mothman since 1966, all with matching descriptions of size, shape and unnaturally red eyes. The more the Mothman was deliberated and described, the creepier its appearance became. However, almost all of the early descriptions of Mothman sightings include the phrase 'bird-like'. Wildlife experts estimate that this monster wasn't just bird-like, but a bird. The sandhill crane is the main suspect – a bird that stands at the same height as a human and has vibrant red feathers around its eyes.

The sandhill crane's red eyes and outline could be misinterpreted as Mothman

Bigfoot hunters search for unusually large footprints like this one, discovered in 1980

THE LEGEND OF BIGFOOT

Bigfoot (page 44) is a famous creature that resides in North America, named by some loggers in California who stumbled across its gigantic footprint in 1958. Since this first discovery, many sightings and tracks have been reported. Among the clearest evidence are pictures of hairy beings trudging through the wilderness. Some people became obsessed with these photos, while others were convinced they were pranksters playing dress-up.

EXPLANATION

In 2002, after the death of Ray Wallace – one of the Californian loggers who found the early Bigfoot evidence – it was finally confirmed that the footprints were a hoax. Four decades after starting the monster craze, Wallace's family admitted that he had used large wooden foot templates to create Yeti-like foot impressions in the mud. The footprints were initially placed around construction equipment to try and scare away vandals when it was left overnight. However, after gaining a surprising amount of public interest, the Bigfoot story became a fun prank that quickly snowballed into full-on monster hysteria.

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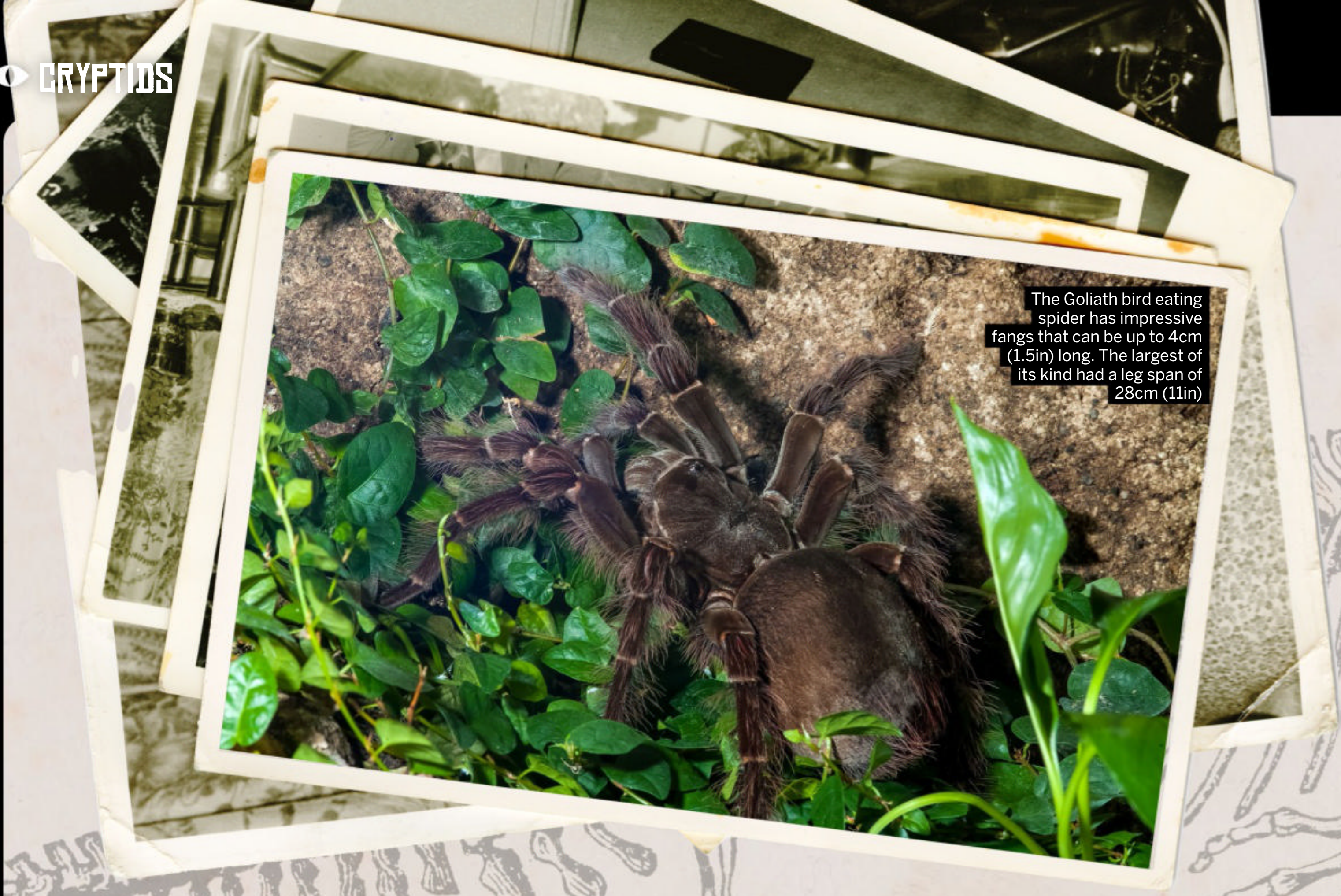
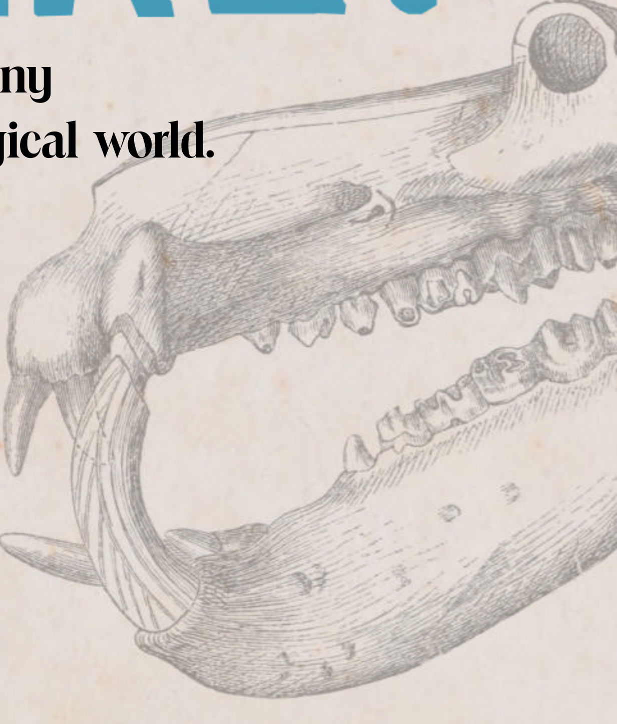


The Goliath bird eating spider has impressive fangs that can be up to 4cm (1.5in) long. The largest of its kind had a leg span of 28cm (11in)

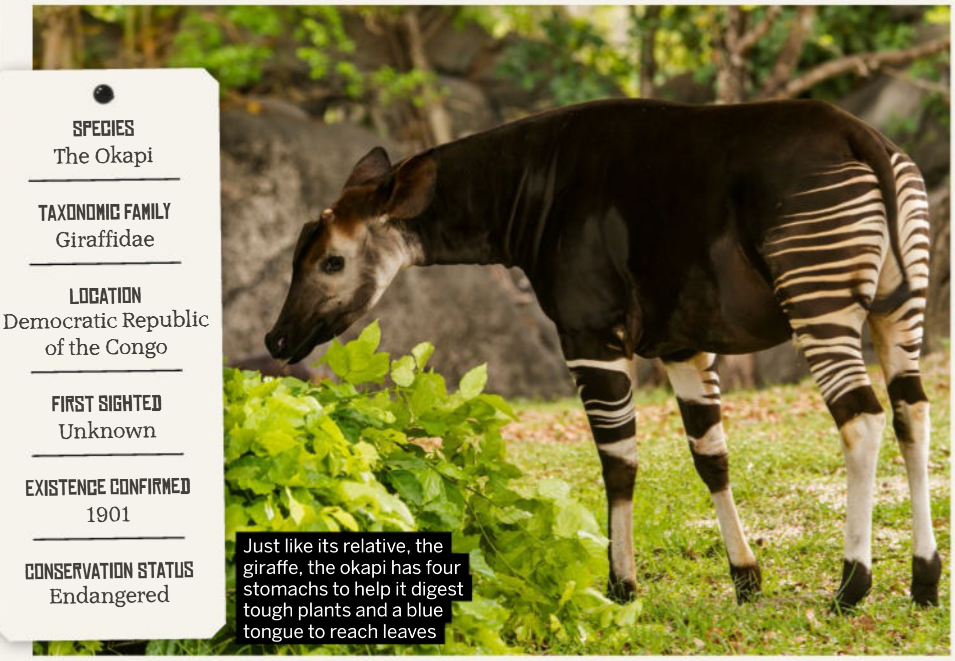
NO SUCH THING AS MONSTERS?

They may have started out as cryptids, but many creatures are now acknowledged by the zoological world. Who says there's no such thing as monsters?



For those who disregard cryptozoology as a pseudo-scientific waste of time, the argument is that monsters simply don't exist. Humans have mapped the darkest recesses of the planet, catalogued the animal kingdom from the largest thundering beast to the smallest crawling insect. Myths are nothing more than stories, folkloric tales of imaginary creatures, designed to entertain or terrify. However, the problem with this close-minded stance is that people have maintained this attitude for hundreds of years, despite the fact that many supposed 'myths' have been proven to live in the real world.

When explorers brought back tales of quadrupeds over fives metres tall (18 feet) with abnormally long necks, the scientific world roared with laughter. Today, any child knows that giraffes are real. In fact, many former cryptids are now well-established zoological entities. Entomologists initially smiled at the Amazonian tribespeople's warning of the gargantuan arachnids that crept across the jungle floor. The discovery of the 175-gram (6.2-ounce) Goliath bird-eating spider soon quashed their condescending attitude. The question is, how many more cryptids are out there, hiding in the shadows, waiting to be discovered?



SPECIES
The Okapi

TAXONOMIC FAMILY
Giraffidae

LOCATION
Democratic Republic of the Congo

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

EXISTENCE CONFIRMED
1901

CONSERVATION STATUS
Endangered

Just like its relative, the giraffe, the okapi has four stomachs to help it digest tough plants and a blue tongue to reach leaves

THE ATTI OR THE AFRICAN UNICORN

When Sir Harry Johnston, the British Governor of Uganda, brought back the skin and skeleton of a strange creature, known locally by the African tribes as the Atti or O'api, the African Unicorn was finally recognised as a genuine animal and no longer considered to be a cryptid.

It was in fact an okapi – a shy solitary mammal living in the Ituri Forest in Central Africa. Its appearance, a mixture of donkey, zebra, giraffe, antelope and deer, made it seem too fantastical to be real, despite the assurance of the local people. But when the specimen was sent to the British Museum, the okapi was acknowledged as real.

It is the only living relative of the giraffe and even shares its long blue tongue. The mish-mash of characteristics make the okapi resemble a mythical chimera and it is because of its magical appearance that it is regularly used as a symbol of cryptozoological success stories.

The Asian Unicorn, or Saola, tends to live along the river valleys and streams. During winter, they migrate to the Annamite Range

IT IS REGULARLY USED AS A SYMBOL OF CRYPTOZOOLOGICAL SUCCESS STORIES

RECENTLY DISCOVERED BEASTS

The Saola, a large, antelope-like hoofed mammal related to cattle, was discovered in Vietnam in 1992. It is one of the largest land mammals found in recent years. Although it's often stated as an example of how new large animals – and therefore potentially cryptids – can still be found, it was not reported anecdotally prior to its discovery and so was never a cryptid.

The Kipunji is a shaggy-furred, tree-dwelling Tanzanian monkey, named in 2005. What makes it of special interest to cryptozoologists is that it was only discovered after conservationist Tim Davenport investigated rumours of a shy, unusual species known to local people.

THE BEAST OF INDONESIA

Rumours of a monstrous beast, a wingless dragon that stalked the Indonesian islands, were disregarded by biologists as an absurd legend. However, Lieutenant van Steyn van Hensbroek of the Dutch colonial administration was determined to prove the myth was very much a reality. Having caught and killed one, he sent the skin and an accompanying photograph to the Zoological Museum in Java but scientists were still sceptical since the creature looked more like a dinosaur. However, no-one was able to dismiss the two live specimens delivered to the Bronx Museum in New York. London Zoo exhibited a further two creatures when the Reptile House opened in 1927.

The Komodo Dragon is the largest living lizard on Earth, reaching a maximum length of three metres (ten feet). Although they don't breathe fire, their mouths can still cause damage. Originally, they were thought to kill their prey using bacteria in their saliva but it is now known that they possess a venomous bite, making them one of only a few known poisonous lizards.

SPECIES
Komodo Dragon

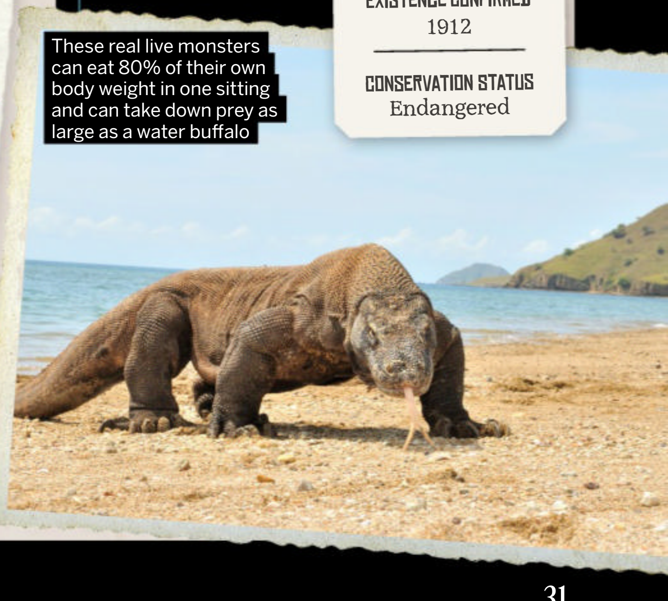
TAXONOMIC FAMILY
Varanidae

LOCATION
Indonesian islands of Komodo, Rinca, Flores, Gili Motang and Padar

FIRST SIGHTED
1910

EXISTENCE CONFIRMED
1912

CONSERVATION STATUS
Endangered



These real live monsters can eat 80% of their own body weight in one sitting and can take down prey as large as a water buffalo

THE FOX-MAN HYBRID

In 1499, explorer Amerigo Vespucci described a mysterious creature that he discovered along the southern coast of Australia. Stories of the grotesque beast with a fox-like head, monkey's tail, and human hands quickly spread. It seemed the creature used a fur bag to transport its young in too! But where exactly was the proof of these mythical monsters' existence?

In 1770, Sir Joseph Banks and Captain James Cook spotted kangaroos while on their first voyage. The first kangaroo to reach English shores was given to King George III as a gift and, shortly after, a number of kangaroos were duly shipped to England for the amusement of the ruling classes.

Although the kangaroo is no longer considered to be a cryptid, cryptozoologists are always on the hunt for elusive Phantom Kangaroos. These are colonies of wallabies or kangaroos that have been spotted in strange and unexpected places. A group of red-necked wallabies were discovered living in the United Kingdom. They are thought to have escaped from a private zoo and are now thriving in the wild.

SPECIES
Kangaroo

TAXONOMIC FAMILY
Macropodidae

LOCATION
Australia

FIRST SIGHTED
1499

EXISTENCE CONFIRMED
1770

CONSERVATION STATUS
Least Concern

When explorers first saw a baby joey hiding in his mother's pouch, they thought the creature was carrying its offspring in a bag

SPECIES
Platypus

TAXONOMIC FAMILY
Ornithorhynchidae

LOCATION
Australia

FIRST SIGHTED
1798

EXISTENCE CONFIRMED
1799

CONSERVATION STATUS
Near Threatened

They might look like adorable cuddly creatures, but the male platypus has a hollow spur on his hind leg connected to a venom-secreting gland

A HOAX CHIMERA

So strange is the platypus, that even after a pelt had been brought back for analysis, it was considered to be nothing more than an elaborate hoax and scientists attempted to 'unpick' the duck's bill from the beaver's body to prove it! Anatomist, Robert Knox, was of the opinion it had been fabricated by Asian taxidermists.

As if looking like a cartoon character wasn't strange enough, this wonderfully bizarre creature with its beaver tail, otter's feet and duck's bill, is also a monotreme – one of five egg-laying mammals. The former cryptid has always been revered by the Aboriginal Australians and even given the status of a totem by the Wadi Wadi people. The indigenous people tell of a duck that strayed too far from the other birds and was kidnapped by a large water rat. Having escaped the clutches of the rodent, she laid two eggs, which hatched into the first platypus pups.

While the platypus is no longer a cryptid, one particular type remains a mystery. The Baraboo platypus has never been proven to exist but is said to be a feral creature that lives in the Baraboo River in Wisconsin.

NGAGI, ENGE-ENA, OR THE VIRUNGA MOUNTAIN OGRE

For hundreds of years, tribespeople warned explorers of the ferocious mountain apemen that kidnapped humans to take back to their lair and eat them. Throughout the 19th century, lurid stories of women being strangled by these enormous hairy beasts terrified travellers into avoiding the mountain routes until in 1902, Captain Robert von Beringe shot an 'ogre' while in the Virunga region of Rwanda. At last the monstrous cryptid, Enge-Ena, was proven to exist, although the tall tales of its violent behaviour have been replaced with the reality of its gentle, docile character. Luckily, these magnificent creatures are predominantly herbivores and very unlikely to nibble on a passing tourist.

Despite their fearsome reputation as human-eating ogres, mountain gorillas are peaceful creatures that live in family units

SPECIES
Mountain Gorilla

TAXONOMIC FAMILY
Hominidae

LOCATION
East Africa

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

EXISTENCE CONFIRMED
1902

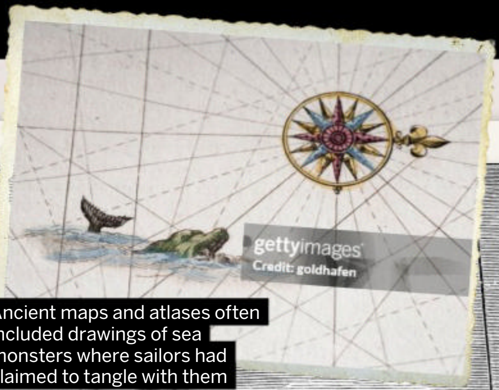
CONSERVATION STATUS
Critically Endangered

KRAKEN

The Kraken is a legendary sea monster, lurking in the deepest depths of the ocean, waiting for an unsuspecting ship to pass so that it might use its coiling tentacles to drag the vessel and all who sail in it down to a watery grave. Many believe that it remains a cryptid today but that simply isn't the case. The Kraken, or giant squid, is very much real. The ancient world spoke of a mysterious nautical creature, but, despite a Danish zoologist finding a beached specimen in 1840, scientists refused to accept such a beast might exist until the 1870s, when a number of giant squid were recovered from the shores of Labrador and Newfoundland.

No-one knows exactly how big these mighty sea creatures grow. The largest specimen is over 12 metres (40 feet) long, but sucker marks discovered on the bodies of sperm whales suggest that there is a much bigger creature – the colossal squid – lurking in the deep.

In 2004, Japanese scientists managed to capture images of a live giant squid in its natural habitat. Subsequent film footage is released periodically but it seems that the Kraken is determined to remain as mysterious as ever.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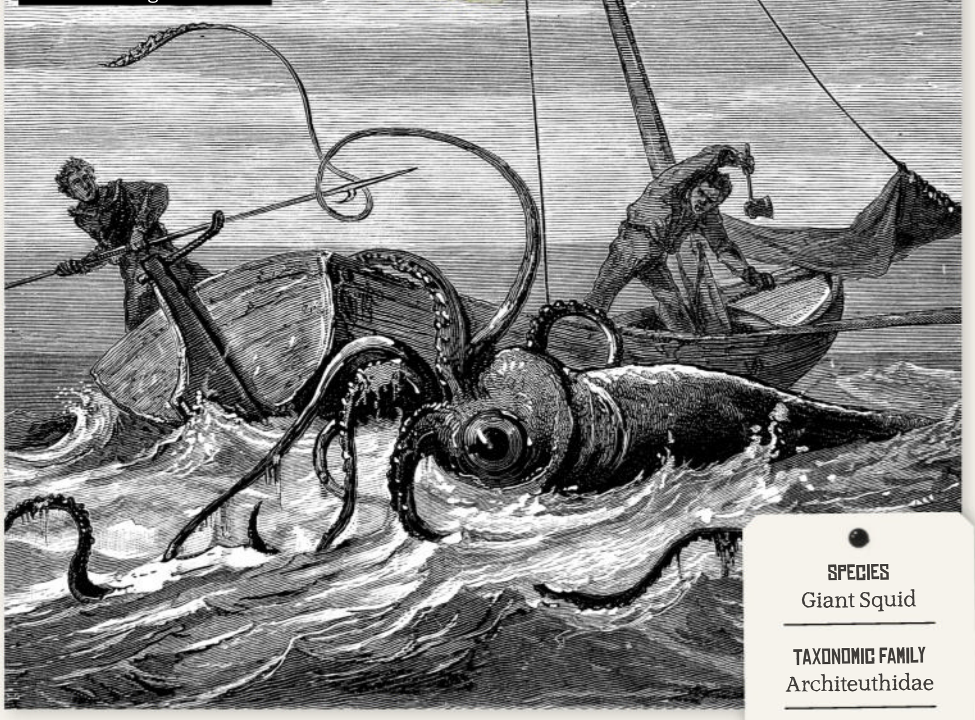
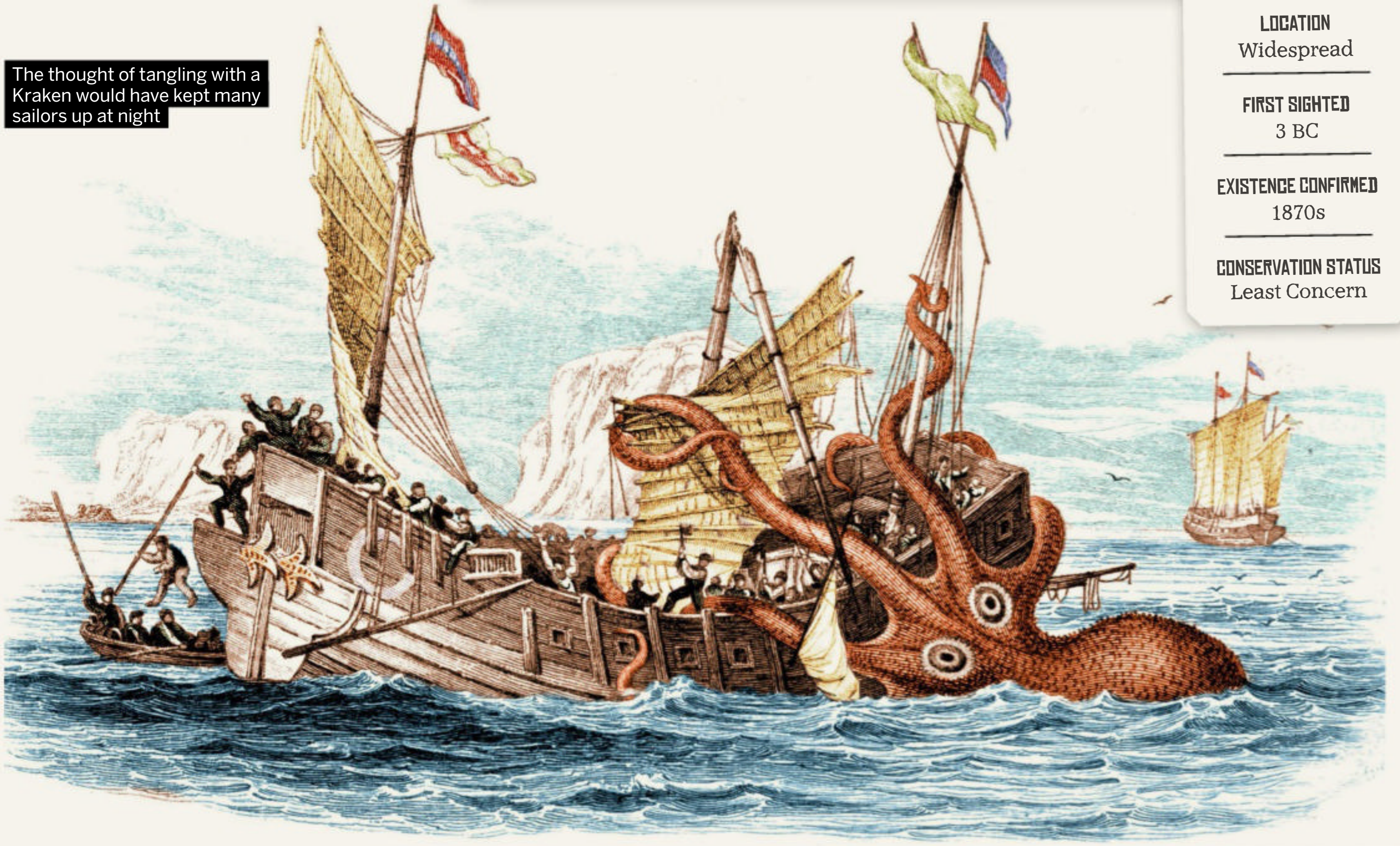
Credit: goldhafen

Ancient maps and atlases often included drawings of sea monsters where sailors had claimed to tangle with them



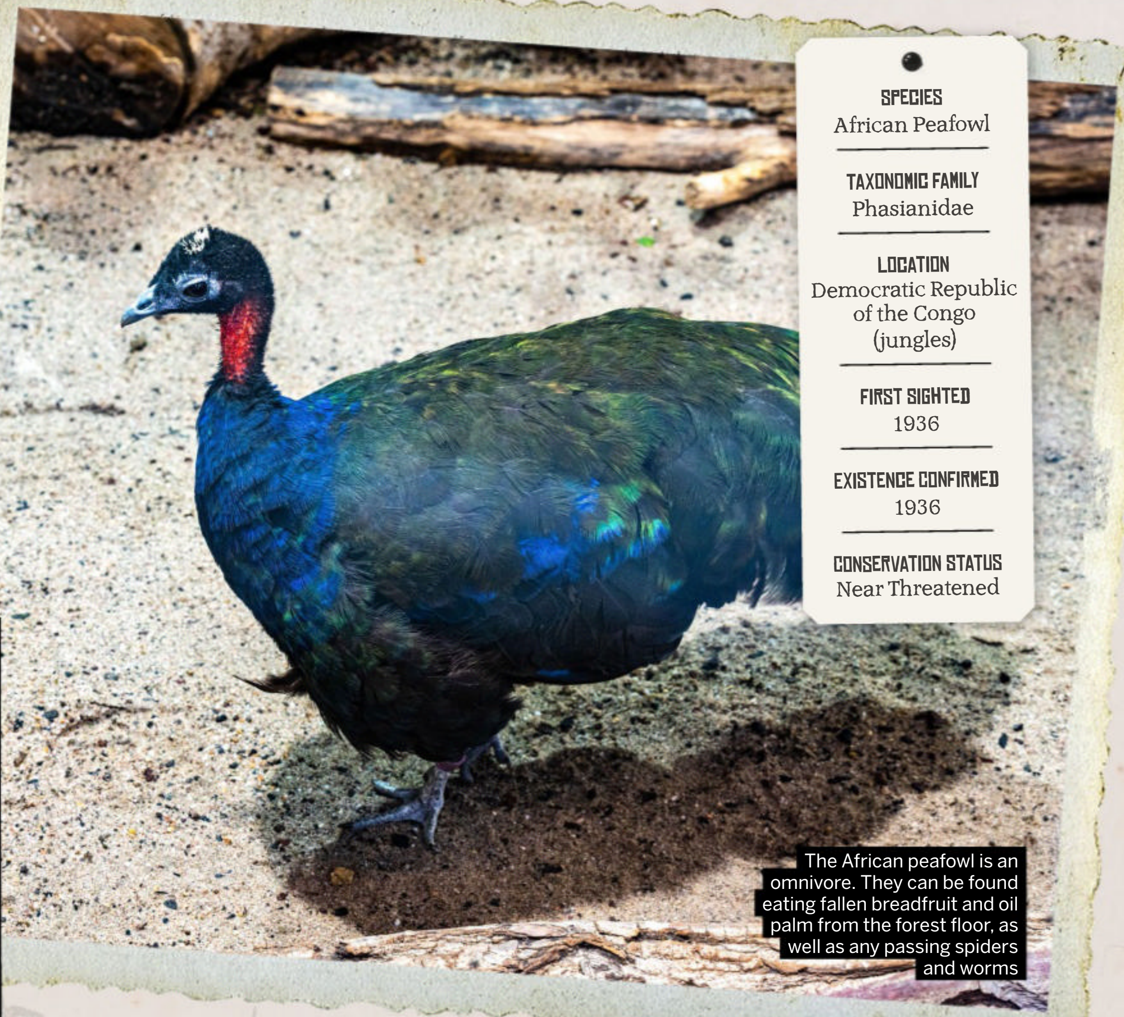
SPECIES	Giant Squid
TAXONOMIC FAMILY	Architeuthidae
LOCATION	Widespread
FIRST SIGHTED	3 BC
EXISTENCE CONFIRMED	1870s
CONSERVATION STATUS	Least Concern



The thought of tangling with a Kraken would have kept many sailors up at night

MBULU

For centuries, people knew of the beautiful peafowl, both blue and green, but it was assumed that these birds were native to Asia and nowhere else. However, local tribespeople regularly brought back peacock-like feathers out of the remotest areas of the jungle, spurring explorers and cryptozoologists into action. Could Mbulu truly exist? The answer is of course a resounding 'yes' and the African peafowl is now formally recognised. Although less showy than its Asian relative, and without the amazing fantail of a green or blue peacock, the African peafowl still has a beautiful iridescent body in shades of blue or orange.



SPECIES
African Peafowl

TAXONOMIC FAMILY
Phasianidae

LOCATION
Democratic Republic of the Congo (jungles)

FIRST SIGHTED
1936

EXISTENCE CONFIRMED
1936

CONSERVATION STATUS
Near Threatened

The African peafowl is an omnivore. They can be found eating fallen breadfruit and oil palm from the forest floor, as well as any passing spiders and worms

THE MIGHTY HOGZILLA

There have been many reports of outsized wild boar but most are dismissed as gross exaggeration or outright hoaxes. However, in 2004, a male hybrid of wild hog and domestic pig was shot and killed in Georgia, United States. Scientists, who named it Hogzilla, confirmed it weighed 363 kilograms (800 pounds) and was approximately 2.6 metres (8.6 feet) long. His tusks were nearly 72 centimetres (28 inches) long. Another mythical hog turned out to be real when explorers finally identified the pygmy hippo. Ironically, the animal was a miniature hippopotamus rather than an abnormally large pig.

SPECIES
Wild Hog x Domestic Pig hybrid

TAXONOMIC FAMILY
Suidae

LOCATION
United States

FIRST SIGHTED
2004

EXISTENCE CONFIRMED
2004

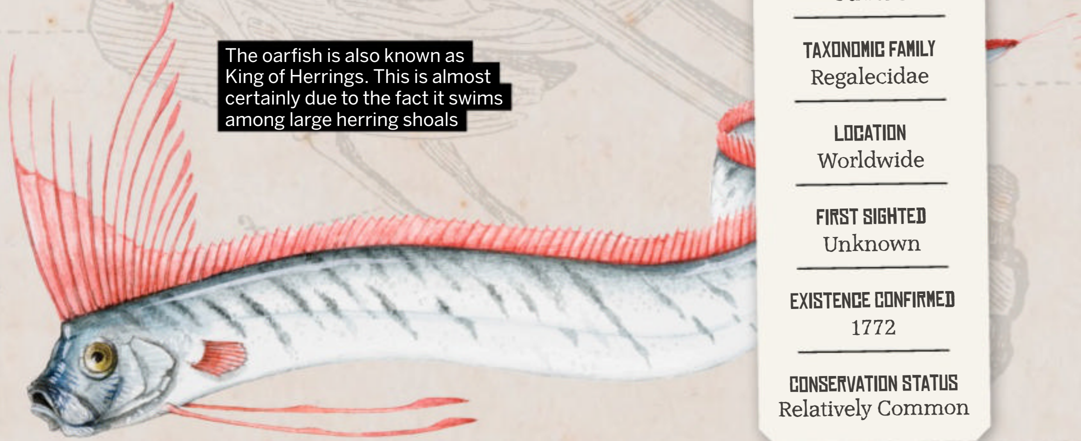
CONSERVATION STATUS
One Of A Kind

Like Hogzilla, the chacoan peccary of Paraguay was initially considered to be an extinct giant pig until 1971, when a live specimen was discovered

SEA SERPENT OR DOOMSDAY FISH

Biologist, Peter Ascanius, first described an oarfish in 1772, but rumours of giant sea serpents continued long after its capture. It's no wonder that people believed it to be a mythical sea monster – with its crown of bright red fin rays adorning its head and its long, rippling, ribbon-like body, it certainly looks like a serpent and matches many of the witness accounts of sailors spotting monsters far out at sea. The longest recorded oarfish measured in at 17 metres (56 feet) with a bright red dorsal fin running down its body but, despite its impressive size, it remains elusive and it wasn't until 2010 that the first film footage was taken of it swimming in its natural habitat.

Various myths surround this mysterious fish, the most bizarre being that it is thought to predict disasters. Oarfish are said to beach themselves upon the shore line when an earthquake is imminent, hence the nickname Doomsday Fish.



The oarfish is also known as King of Herrings. This is almost certainly due to the fact it swims among large herring shoals

SPECIES
Oarfish

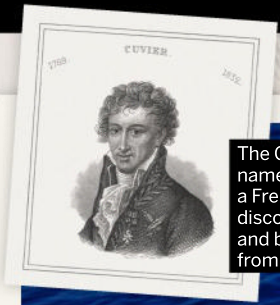
TAXONOMIC FAMILY
Regalecidae

LOCATION
Worldwide

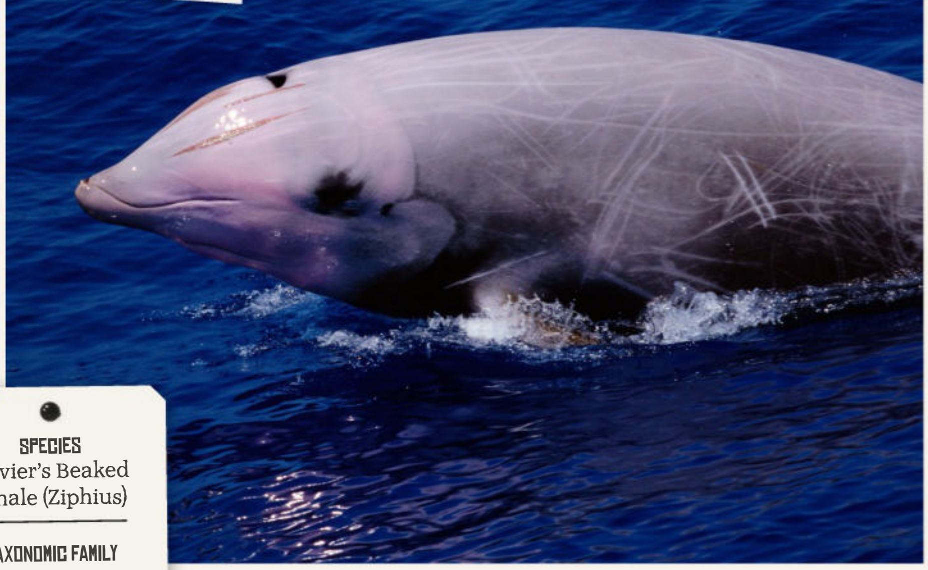
FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

EXISTENCE CONFIRMED
1772

CONSERVATION STATUS
Relatively Common



The Cuvier's beaked whale is named after George Cuvier, a French naturalist, who discovered a skull fragment and believed it to be a fossil from an extinct species



SPECIES
Cuvier's Beaked Whale (Ziphius)

TAXONOMIC FAMILY
Ziphiidae

LOCATION
Worldwide

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

EXISTENCE CONFIRMED
1850

CONSERVATION STATUS
Least Concern

THE WATER-OWL

Medieval sailors feared the monstrous Water-Owl as it was said to attack passing ships, drowning all those aboard. Despite having the body of a fish, it was thought that its head resembled that of an owl due to its enormous black eyes and short blunt beak. Sailors claimed that its sharp fin could effortlessly cut through the hull of a ship. When an unidentified carcass washed up on the shores of Monterey Bay in 1925, the creature was named 'the Moore's Beach Monster'. It was later confirmed to be a beaked whale. These beautiful creatures can dive to a depth of 2,992 metres (9,816 feet) and stay there for up to 222 minutes.

THE MAGICAL CAT SITH

These elegant felines, with their long legs and bristly black coats flecked with white, were once said to belong to the Fae Folk. The macabre moggie was thought to have the ability to steal the souls of the dead and was feared by the local highlanders. However, when one was trapped in a snare in the village of Kellas in 1984, the cryptid was finally recognised as a hybrid between domestic cats and the Scottish wildcat. Sadly, the wildcat is on the decline and scientists have warned that, as more breed with feral and domestic cats, the pure Scottish wildcats will disappear. It's strange to think that the mythical fairy cat could outlive the previously recognised native kitty.

SPECIES
Scottish wildcat x Domestic House cat hybrid

TAXONOMIC FAMILY
Felidae

LOCATION
Scotland

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

EXISTENCE CONFIRMED
1984

CONSERVATION STATUS
One Of A Kind

GOLDEN TURTLE GOD

Legend has it that emperor Le Loi was boating on Hoan Kiem Lake when a turtle leapt out of the water and snatched his magical sword. The turtle dived back into the water, taking the sword with him. The sword had been given to the emperor by Kim Qui, the Golden Turtle God, in order to defeat the Chinese Ming Dynasty and the emperor believed that the Turtle God had simply reclaimed his weapon. Despite searching day and night, neither the sword nor the turtle were seen again. The story was passed down through the generations but was considered nothing more than a myth, despite occasional cryptid sightings. However, scientists confirmed the existence of the Hoan Kiem turtle in March 1998, when they caught the elusive reptile on film. They later took a number of live samples away to study. The last known Hoan Kiem turtle living in the lake was reported dead in January, 2016.

SPECIES
Hoan Kiem Turtle

TAXONOMIC FAMILY
Trionychidae

LOCATION
Vietnam

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

EXISTENCE CONFIRMED
1998

CONSERVATION STATUS
Extinct In The Wild

A small building in the middle of Hoan Kiem Lake, named Turtle Tower, is said to house the remains of the sacred turtle

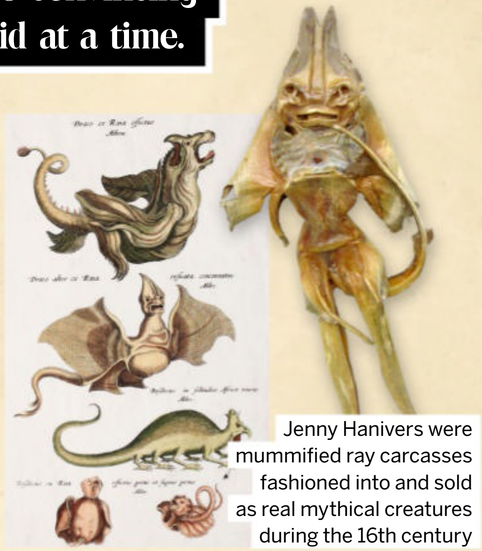
THE WORLD OF HOAXES

For every convincing cryptid, there are countless convincing fakes, taking the world one mummified mermaid at a time.

Wherever there are mysteries, magic and discoveries to be made, there are always countless people ready to make a quick buck, or revel in the thrill of hysteria. Hoaxes play a huge role in the history and proliferation of cryptozoology, whereby the excitement of discovering a new cryptid can be manipulated for fame, fortune or pure entertainment.

Hoaxes have been a present threat and source of mirth for as long as humans have sought to discover and study the world. In the 16th century, while alchemists toiled to transform base metals into gold, they also proliferated the hoax of the Homunculus. It was believed that the practice of alchemy could conjure all things, including a tiny, artificial human who would spring forth, fully formed and in possession of magical powers. While methods of horse-based incubation were laid out in alchemical writings, the Homunculus was a work of fiction that found a second life in folktales of the 19th century.

While sideshow giants and paper mâché mermaids make for fascinating curiosities, and rabbits with deer antlers continue as testament to humans' love of the weird, hoaxes can be deeply harmful to genuine study. Precious resources that could otherwise benefit the wider scientific field have been periodically squandered on the investigation of fraudulent claims, or the deliberate fabrication of incorrect scientific papers. However, for every penny wasted on fake cryptids, applying scientific methods of study to cryptid reports has resulted in the discovery of several new species of animal; animals once believed to be figments of our imaginations. Familiar creatures such as the kangaroo, giant squid and platypus were all once thought to be myths, with many early taxidermy specimens believed to be cleverly-constructed hoaxes. Indeed, when British scientists first laid eyes on a platypus in the 1790s, they deemed it to be an outright fake. George Shaw, keeper of the Natural History Museum, was so unconvinced that he took scissors to the specimen in a vain attempt to find the 'stitches' that attached the bill to the pelt. Similarly, throughout the Middle Ages, narwhal tusks were bought and traded under the apprehension that they were unicorn horns, possessing magical powers and good fortune. This belief continued long into the 18th century, when the aristocracy would use powdered 'unicorn horn' to treat all manner of medical problems. Even Queen Elizabeth I was known to drink from a goblet of carved unicorn horn, believing that it would purify water.



Jenny Hanivers were mummified ray carcasses fashioned into and sold as real mythical creatures during the 16th century

The Victorians are usually celebrated for the revolutionising of industry, communication and transport, but something that should also be acknowledged is their devotion to the rich tradition of 'Natural History Hoaxes'. While archaeological hoaxes were well established by the time the 19th century rolled around, the age of the circus and sideshow offered new opportunities for increasingly dramatic creatures and exhibits to draw large, willing audiences. From George Hull's presentation

> "HOAXES ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE STORY AND STUDY OF CRYPTIDS"

2.a.
2
Turpin direx.
Bouquet sculp.
CHIDNÉ épineux.
RHYNQUE. 2.a. Museau vu en dessus.
Prêtre pinx.
Turpin direx.
KANGUROO géant.

of the ‘Cardiff Giant’ to hordes of replicas of P T Barnum’s ‘Feejee Mermaid’, brought home by sailors and salespeople alike, hoaxes presented as legitimate discoveries of antiquity became money-printing machines for travelling showpeople and local cabinets of curiosity.

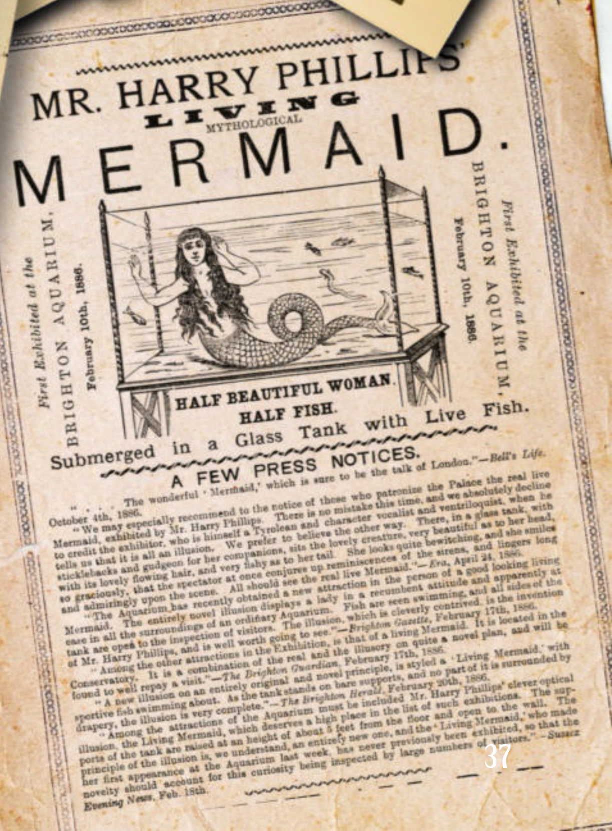
For those who lacked the imagination or drive to concoct their own cryptid hoax, many people across the centuries have integrated themselves into pre-existing stories of mystery and intrigue. The legends of Bigfoot in the USA and the Loch Ness Monster in Scotland remain popular topics for would-be cryptozoologists and hoaxers alike. Faked sightings and evidence are continually attributed to both cryptids, as individuals seek to align themselves with the famous creatures, seeking to gain a little of the infamy and immortality that comes with such an association.

In other instances, perpetuating the belief in a known hoax can be culturally important and enjoyable. The Jackalope, being a jackrabbit with antelope horns, has been a popular mainstay in North American hunting communities and taxidermists since the 1930s. Even thought it remains an acknowledged fake, taxidermised jackalopes and modern folkloric tales of the rabbit’s exploits remain popular, vibrant cultural threads.

Although hoaxes are frustrating incidents to uncover, they are an integral part of the story and study of cryptids. While there may not be goblins and giants at the ends of our gardens, the creativity and sheer audacity of many of these creations are fascinating examples of the strange, confusing nature of humankind itself.

In the 1961 film *What A Whopper*, a writer fabricates a Loch Ness monster hoax in order to sell the story

Whiile the original Bigfoot tracks have been proven a hoax, others are considered genuine



MR. HARRY PHILLIPS'
LIVING
MYTHOLOGICAL
MERMAID.

First Exhibited at the
BRIGHTON AQUARIUM,
February 10th, 1886.

First Exhibited at the
BRIGHTON AQUARIUM,
February 10th, 1886.

HALF BEAUTIFUL WOMAN.
HALF FISH.
Submerged in a Glass Tank with Live Fish.

A FEW PRESS NOTICES.

"... The wonderful 'Mermaid,' which is sure to be the talk of London."—*Bell's Life*. October 4th, 1886.

"We may especially recommend to the notice of those who patronize the Palace the real live Mermaid, exhibited by Mr. Harry Phillips. There is no mistake this time, and we absolutely decline to credit the exhibitor, who is himself a Tyrolean and character vocalist and ventriloquist, when he tells us that it is all an illusion. We prefer to believe the other way. There, in a glass tank, with sticklebacks and gudgeon for her companions, sits the lovely creature, very beautiful as to her head, with its lovely flowing hair, and very fishy as to her tail. She looks quite bewitching, and she smiles so graciously, that the spectator at once conjures up reminiscences of the sirens, and lingers long and admiringly upon the scene. All should see the real live Mermaid."—*Era*, April 24, 1886.

"The Aquarium has recently obtained a new attraction in the person of a good looking living Mermaid. The entirely novel illusion displays a lady in a recumbent attitude and apparently at ease in all the surroundings of an ordinary Aquarium. Fish are seen swimming, and all sides of the tank are open to the inspection of visitors. The illusion, which is cleverly contrived, is the invention of Mr. Harry Phillips, and is well worth going to see."—*Brighton Gazette*, February 17th, 1886.

"Among the other attractions in the Exhibition, is that of a living Mermaid. It is located in the Conservatory. It is a combination of the real and the illusory on quite a novel plan, and will be found to well repay a visit."—*The Brighton Guardian*, February 17th, 1886.

"A new illusion on an entirely original and novel principle, is styled a 'Living Mermaid,' with sportive fish swimming about. As the tank stands on bare supports, and no part of it is surrounded by drapery, the illusion is very complete."—*The Brighton Herald*, February 20th, 1886.

"Among the attractions of the Aquarium must be included Mr. Harry Phillips' clever optical illusion, the Living Mermaid, which deserves a high place in the list of such exhibitions. The supports of the tank are raised at an height of about 5 feet from the floor and open to the wall. The principle of the illusion is, we understand, an entirely new one, and the 'Living Mermaid,' who made her first appearance at the Aquarium last week, has never previously been exhibited, so that the novelty should account for this curiosity being inspected by large numbers of visitors."—*Sussex Evening News*, Feb. 18th.

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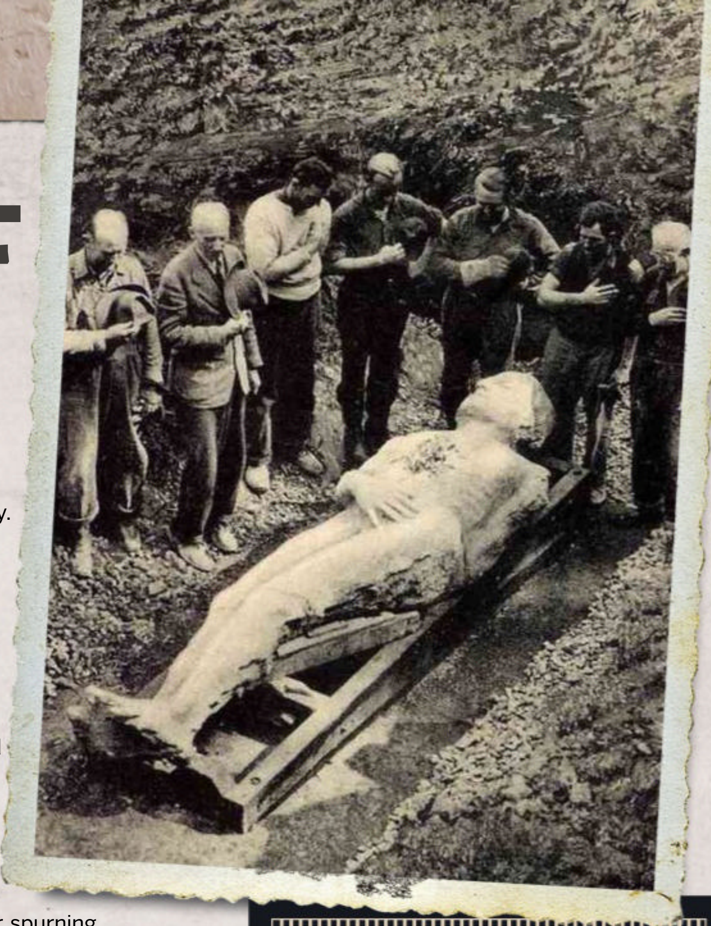
THE CARDIFF GIANT

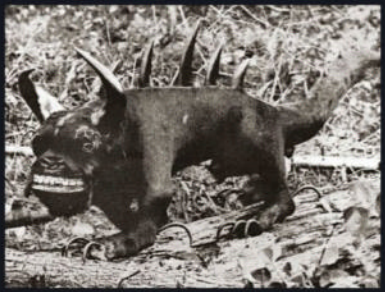
This stone giant gained infamy as 'America's Greatest Hoax'



Standing at 3m (10ft) tall, the 'Cardiff Giant' was an enormous stone man discovered in a field in New York in 1869. This strange 'man' was ultimately believed to be the petrified remains of a biblical giant; a claim that made headlines across the world. Following an argument with a preacher about the literal nature of the Bible, career criminal George Hull decided to extend his religious conflict across state borders and create a biblical revenant that would bring him fame and infamy. Taking inspiration from a line in Genesis 6:4: "There were giants in the earth in those days", Hull purchased a large block of gypsum and commissioned two sculptors to create the likeness of a giant. Transporting his creation from Iowa to New York, Hull buried the 1,356kg (2,990lb) 'giant' in a pit on his cousin's farm, before covering the sculpture and lying in wait. Nearly a year passed before Hull's plan sprang into action as two unsuspecting workers were hired to dig a well on the farm, directly beside the giant's resting place. Just as Hull had hoped, the workers uncovered the giant and word spread of their miraculous discovery. Soon, Hull was charging visitors 50 cents to view the giant, an enterprise so successful that both Hull and the giant went on tour, making vast amounts of money from the public who clamoured to see a discovery that could revolutionise both science and modern theology. However, the giant's glory days were not to last, and after spurning showman P T Barnum's offer of $50,000, a rival replica was made, which proved far more popular than Hull's original. The giant ultimately spent its twilight years travelling between fairgrounds and different owners until it was purchased in 1947 by the Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown, New York, a stone's throw from its exhumation site.

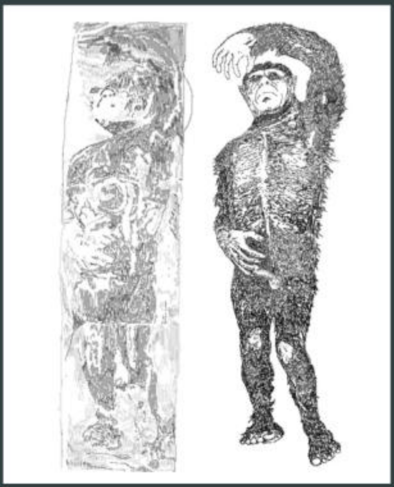
HODAG

Once described as having the head of a frog, the face of an elephant, claws and vicious curved spines across its back, this curious bull-horned cryptid was thought to be a vengeful creature, born from the ashes of ill-treated and cremated oxen. First recorded by renowned local lumberman and prankster, Eugene Shepard, in 1893, initial newspaper reports led to an angry mob leaving their homes to hunt and kill the Hodag. Three years later, stories emerged of the capture of a live Hodag, which Shepard himself exhibited at a county fair. However, when the story piqued the interest of scientific institutes, Shepard admitted to the hoax, revealing his 'live' subject to be made from wood and leather.



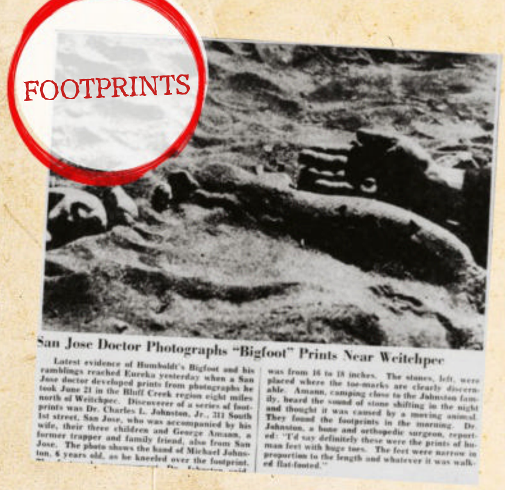
THE MINNESOTA ICEMAN

The 'missing link' between humans and Neanderthals?



This sideshow exhibit of a Bigfoot-looking, 1.8m (6ft) tall, dark and hairy hominid frozen in a block of ice did the rounds during the 1960s and 1970s across the US and Canada. Reportedly found in Siberia, the 'Iceman' was the subject of much scientific intrigue, and was ultimately debunked by the Smithsonian who traced the creature back to its American source in a West Coast workshop. Promoted as the 'missing link' between modern humans and Neanderthals, he was discovered to be a hoax made of latex and hair but not before he was featured on the infamous television show, *Unsolved Mysteries*, in 1994. The Minnesota Iceman is now on display at the Museum of the Weird in Austin, Texas.

BIGFOOT HOAXES


FOOTPRINTS

San Jose Doctor Photographs "Bigfoot" Prints Near Weitchpec

Latest evidence of Humboldt's Bigfoot and his ramblings reached Eureka yesterday when a San Jose doctor developed prints from photographs he took June 21 in the Bluff Creek region eight miles north of Weitchpec. Discoverer of a series of footprints was Dr. Charles L. Johnston, Jr., 311 South 1st street, San Jose, who was accompanied by his wife, their three children and George Amann, a former trapper and family friend, also from San Jose. The photo shows the hand of Michael Johnston, 6 years old, as he kneeled over the footprint.

was from 16 to 18 inches. The stones, left, were placed where the toe-marks are clearly discernable. Amann, camping close to the Johnston family, heard the sound of stone shifting in the night and thought it was caused by a moving animal. They found the footprints in the morning. Dr. Johnston, a bone and orthopedic surgeon, reported: "I'd say definitely these were the prints of human feet with huge toes. The feet were narrow in proportion to the length and whatever it was walked flat-footed."

A SET OF FOOTPRINTS THAT GAVE THE CRYPTID ITS INFAMOUS NAME

On 27 August 1958, Californian logging company worker, Jerry Crew, found a set of heavy footprints by his bulldozer that were 40cm (16in) long. He alerted his colleagues and foreman, Wilbur Wallace. The workers attributed a recent spate of misfortunes and missing materials to the creature they dubbed 'big foot'. In 2002 Wallace died aged 84, after which his family announced that he was indeed, Bigfoot.

DID THEY PUT BIGFOOT ON ICE?

In 2008, Matthew Whitton and Rick Dyer told the press that they found the 2.1m (7ft), 226kg (500lb) body of a half-ape hybrid while out hiking in the Georgia mountains. They claimed to have transported the body home and placed it in a freezer, leaving three similar living creatures behind. The body was quickly revealed to be little more than a rubber costume.

CREATURE IN A FREEZER

THE PATTERSON-GIMLIN FILM

REVERED AND DISMISSED BY CRYPTOZOOLOGISTS ALIKE, THIS ICONIC FOOTAGE IS OFTEN DEBUNKED

Recorded in 1967, this short piece of film captured by Roger Patterson and Robert Gimlin, reportedly depicts a female Bigfoot walking by Bluff Creek in Northern California. While both men maintained the footage's authenticity, its legitimacy has been constantly called into question, with many believing that this iconic sighting is little more than a human in an ape suit.

THETIS LAKE MONSTER

This Canadian cryptid terrified teenagers in the 1970s

The Thetis Lake Monster was only sighted twice in 1972, but left such an impact that it is still feared today. Described as being a reptilian humanoid, 1.5m (5ft) tall, looking remarkably like the 'Creature from the Black Lagoon', this 'lizard man' was reported to have chased two local teenage boys from the beach at Thetis Lake. Four days after the report hit newspaper stands, two more men claimed to have spotted the creature peering from the lake. Two witnesses later rescinded their statements, stating that they initially did so for attention.

Despite it being over 50 years since a sighting, the Thetis Lake Monster still causes chills today

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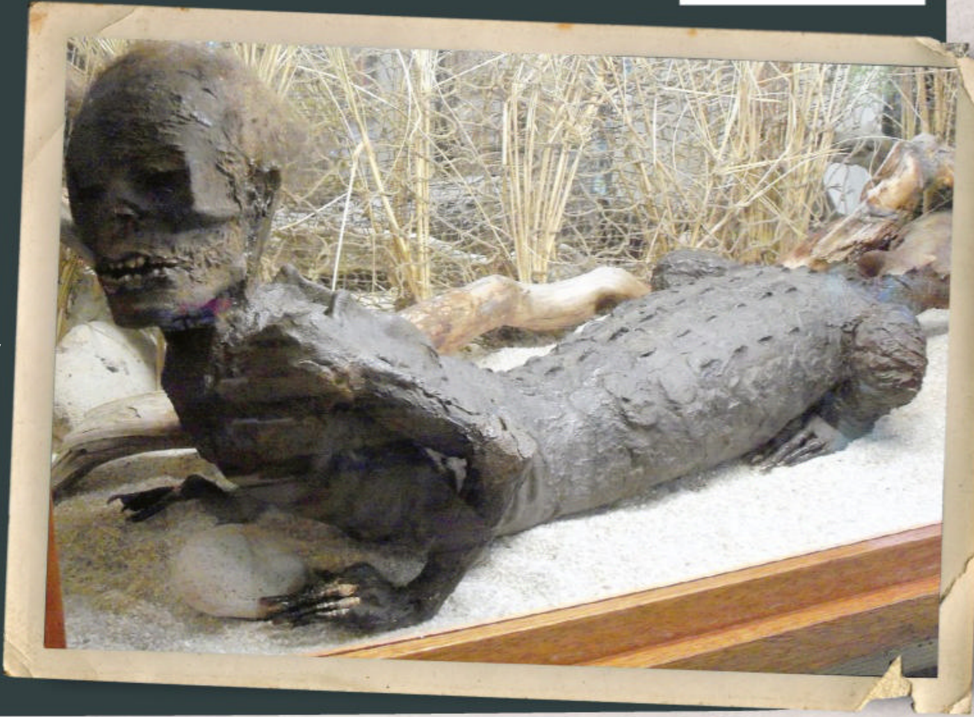
JAKE THE ALLIGATOR MAN

This half-alligator swamp discovery is a mermaid with a difference

Fiji mermaids, or fake mermaid specimens, can be found around the world as sinister local curiosities. However, few have garnered as many fans or such popularity as the desiccated body of Jake the Alligator Man. Purchased for $750 in 1967 by Marsh's Free Museum in Long Beach, Washington, Jake has lived his life as a popular stalwart of the Washington tourist trap. Jake's mummified body is believed to be a mixture of animals and craft supplies, but his exact nature remains unknown. He received national press attention in 1993 when the Floridian tabloid, *The World Weekly News*, led with the headline 'Half-Alligator, Half-Human Found in Florida Swamp', illustrated by a large picture of Jake. While the tabloid periodically reported on his dubious exploits – namely escapes and murders – he is still adored as a local character, where his birthday celebrations are attended by large gatherings every year.



The half-man, half-alligator has become a pop culture figure in the Pacific Northwest, with his own festival and merchandise

HOTHEADED NAKED ICE BORER

The Hotheaded Naked Ice Borer was a mix of a naked mole rat with a growth on its head

An April Fool's joke to make you shudder

The Hotheaded Naked Ice Borer was one of several fictional animals invented by the editor of *Discover* magazine for its April 1995 issue. It also inspired the largest amount of correspondence in the magazine's history. According to *Discover*, which used a doctored image of a naked mole rat to illustrate the article, the Ice Borer had been found in Antarctica and could melt through ice using a protrusion on its head. It went on to describe how the creatures burrow into the ice beneath their prey, before melting it and consuming the unfortunate animal.

HYDRARCHOS

This makeshift sea-serpent was a popular tourist draw

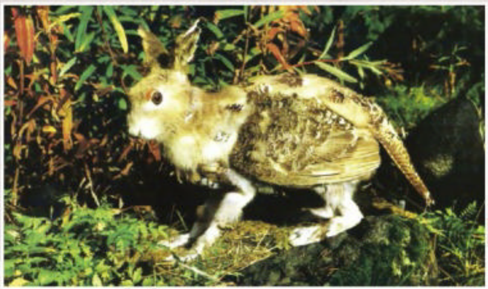
Piecing dinosaur skeletons together to make new and fearsome beasts was a familiar activity for many showpeople of the 19th century, who could concoct a fearsome prop and story with a few bones and some wire. Reportedly discovered in Alabama, the Hydrarchos was an enormous sea serpent, created and displayed by Albert Koch in 1845. Billed as a Leviathan and ancient ruler of the seas, the 34m (114ft) long skeleton was exposed as being the combined remains of several prehistoric sea creatures.

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images. Following images: Wikki Commons Public Domain: Basilosaurus from the National Museum of Natural History, Washington DC. *Jake the Alligator Man* Source:Imhavingfun42. Image *Skvader*, permission granted by Ancient Monument Association of Medelpad. Image: *The Piltdown Man*: Source: Calvin Suverill Case

SKVADER

This Swedish hare hybrid could run faster than most!

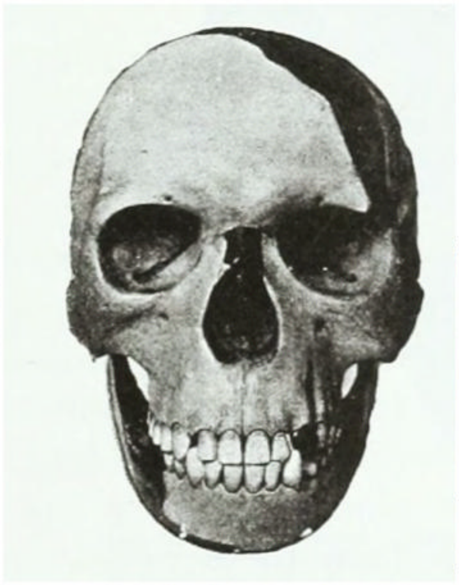
Much like the Jackalope, the Skvader is an example of a cryptid born from the taxidermist's bench. Created in 1918 by taxidermist Rudolf Granberg, the Skvader features the head and legs of a hare, with the wings and tail of a wood grouse and has become a popular symbol of the town of Sundsvall. The concept originated with a man called Håken Dahlmark in a strange boast of hunting prowess during a dinner gathering. After claiming to have shot such a strange animal, the story passed around the social circle and Granberg was ultimately commissioned to make a likeness of the mythical animal for a local museum.

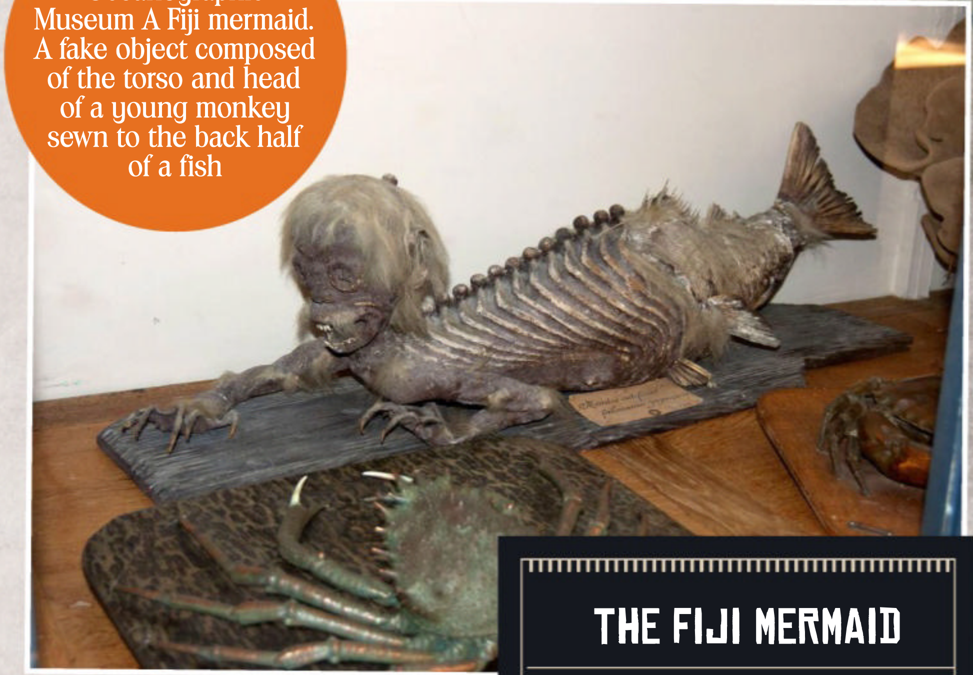


THE PILTDOWN MAN

A bone jigsaw or a real missing link?

When amateur archaeologist Charles Dawson claimed in 1912 to have discovered the 'missing link' between apes and humankind, the scientific world set alight. Dawson had discovered skull fragments and tools near to the village of Piltdown in Sussex, England and presented his findings as being that of an early human ancestor, who lived over 500,000 years ago. His findings were accepted by scientific communities as having untold importance, offering a tangible glimpse into our pre-human past. However, when sophisticated dating methods developed in the 1940s, scientists took a closer look at the skull and found it to be a mere 50,000 years old, and not even from the same species. It was revealed that skull and jaw fragments from a human and orangutan were filed, stained and modified to fit alongside other staged artefacts, making the once miraculous discovery a very sophisticated scientific hoax.

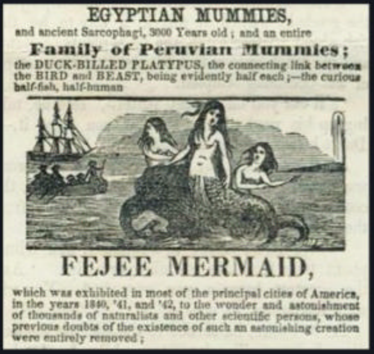




Monaco Oceanographic Museum A Fiji mermaid. A fake object composed of the torso and head of a young monkey sewn to the back half of a fish

THE FIJI MERMAID

Also known as a 'Feejee Mermaid', the Fiji Mermaid is a name given to a fake cryptid, compromising of the head and torso of a monkey, sewn onto the body and tail portion of a fish. Popularised by P T Barnum, the original Fiji Mermaid was purchased in 1822 by American sea captain Samuel Barrett Edes, who obtained the object from Japanese sailors. Years later, Barnum popularised the creature and organised news articles, events, pamphlets and a new fabricated history for his mermaid, claiming that it had been caught by a doctor in South Africa. So successful were Barnum's efforts that he inspired a wave of imitators that continue to fill museum cabinets today. While there are several mermaids in current travelling sideshows that claim to be the 'original', none have provided satisfactory evidence.



EGYPTIAN MUMMIES,

and ancient Sarcophagi, 3000 Years old; and an entire

Family of Peruvian Mummies;

the DUCK-BILLED PLATYPUS, the connecting link between the BIRD and BEAST, being evidently half each;—the curious half-fish, half-human

FEJEE MERMAID,

which was exhibited in most of the principal cities of America, in the years 1840, '41, and '42, to the wonder and astonishment of thousands of naturalists and other scientific persons, whose previous doubts of the existence of such an astonishing creation were entirely removed;

HUMANOIDS

These creatures cross often into uncanny territory, standing upright and assuming anthropomorphic aspects. While some promise to solve the evolutionary missing link between us and the apes, others are far more terrifying – appearing to be monstrous hybrids of man and beast or some abomination of genetic engineering

44 Hairy Apemen
Bigfoot, Sasquatch, Yowie, Orang Pendek

56 Hunt For The Abominable Snowman

60 Mothman

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64 Pukwudgie

66 New Jersey Devil

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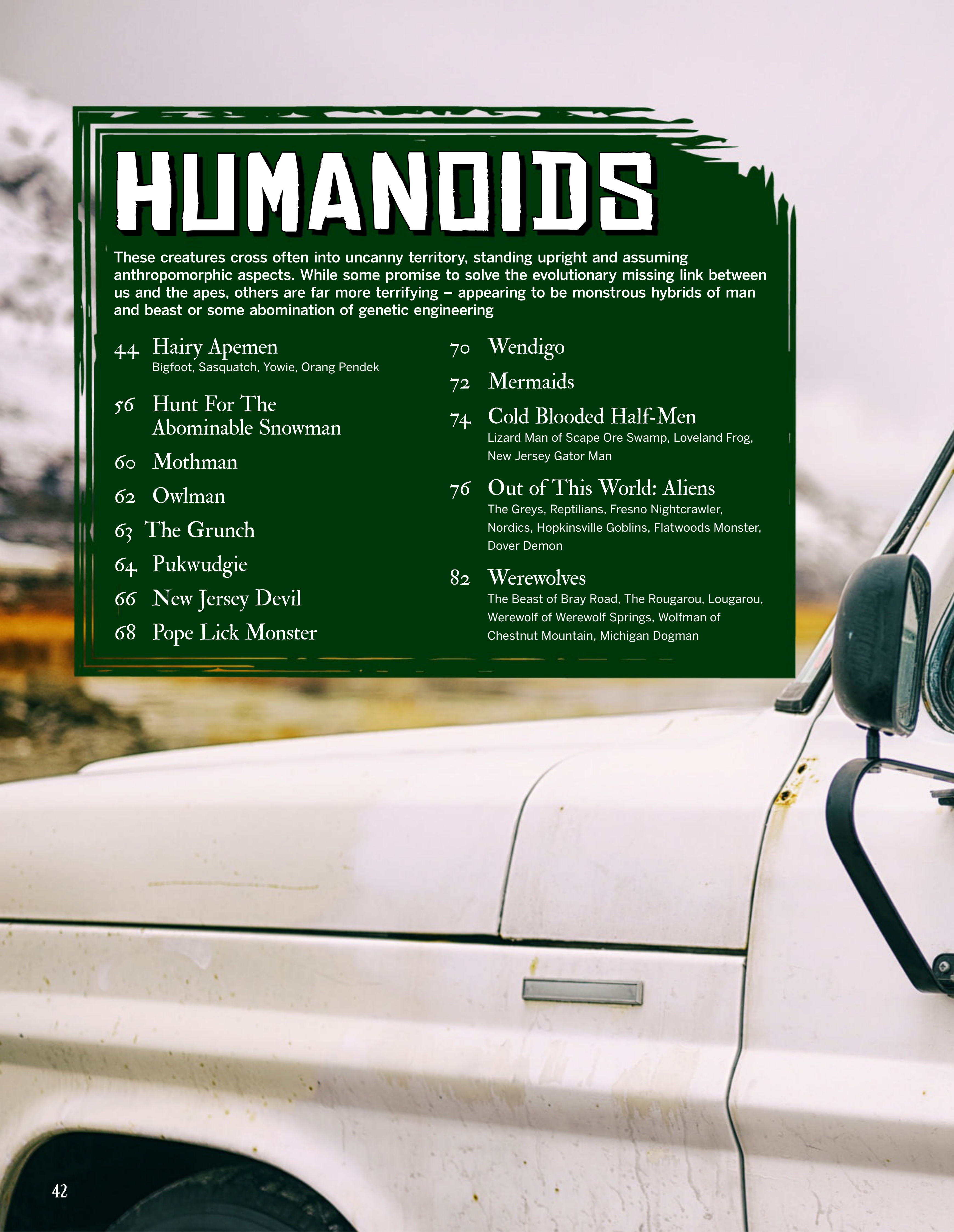
72 Mermaids

74 Cold Blooded Half-Men
Lizard Man of Scape Ore Swamp, Loveland Frog, New Jersey Gator Man

76 Out of This World: Aliens
The Greys, Reptilians, Fresno Nightcrawler, Nordics, Hopkinsville Goblins, Flatwoods Monster, Dover Demon

82 Werewolves
The Beast of Bray Road, The Rougarou, Lougarou, Werewolf of Werewolf Springs, Wolfman of Chestnut Mountain, Michigan Dogman

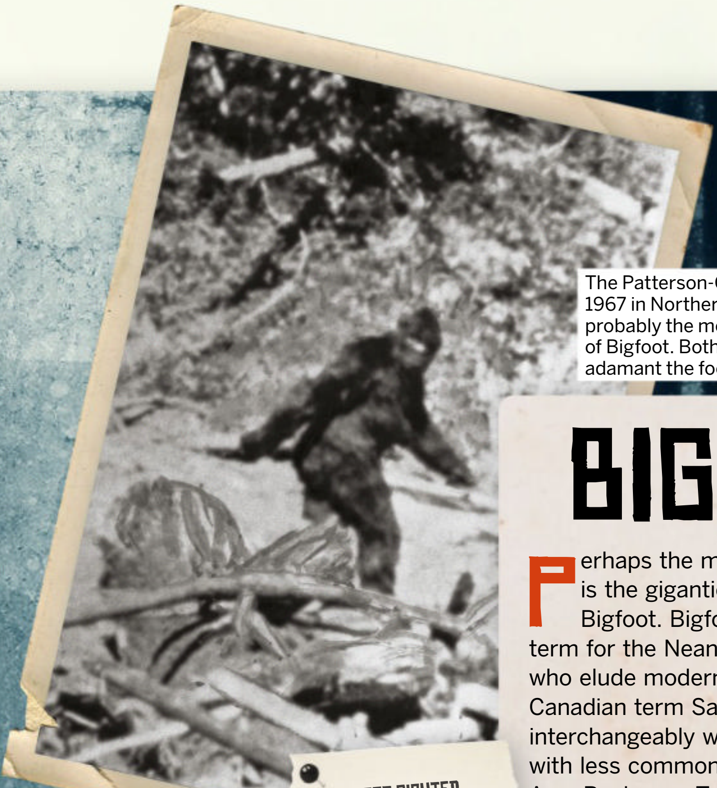


HAIRY APEMEN

From Bigfoot to the Yeti, humanoid cryptids continue to captivate our curiosity

Almost every country and culture in the world tells tales of hairy bipedal wild men, often associated with woodland, forest or mountain settings. From the United States' Bigfoot, Canada's Sasquatch and the Yowies of Australia, to the Yeti of Nepal, the Orang Pendek of Indonesia, the Amomongo of the Philippines and the Chinese Yeren, these cryptids share hominid characteristics, such as being covered from head to toe in hair – save for the soles of the feet and the palms of the hands – and behaviours such as building nests and eating an omnivorous diet. Like humans, they stand upright on two legs and many are described as having reddish, dark brown, black, white or grey hair. However, these humanoid cryptids often appear to have monstrous features, such as being significantly larger than the average human, possessing glowing red or yellow eyes, sharp teeth and claws and some emit a stench that is worse than a wet dog who has rolled in fox excrement. Sceptics say that sightings of these giant ape-men are simply misidentified bears, other humans, escaped apes, pareidolia (essentially people's brains playing tricks on them) or even wolves, owls and other common species. Other more elaborate theories include the idea that these personified primates could be an extinct species of Southeast Asian ape, Gigantopithecus blacki (the fact that Southeast Asia has a number of hominoid cryptids adds a little credence to this theory), or perhaps an extinct hominidae, such as Paranthropus robustus, surviving Neanderthals or an archaic human subspecies, and that they could provide the 'missing link' in humanity's evolution. Whatever they are, they have been spotted for generations, throughout the world by numerous peoples of varying cultures and dubbed many different names.

SASQUATCH
X-ING



The Patterson-Gimlin film, shot in 1967 in Northern California, is probably the most famous footage of Bigfoot. Both filmmakers were adamant the footage was real

BIGFOOT

Perhaps the most famous of all cryptids is the gigantic biped ape known as Bigfoot. Bigfoot is the most popular term for the Neanderthal-like creatures who elude modern Western society. The Canadian term Sasquatch is often used interchangeably with the Bigfoot label, along with less common terms such as Wood Ape, Bushman, Treeman and Wildman. Sightings and stories of such hominids have been spotted all over North America for centuries and persisted in native lore. The Neanderthal-like creatures are described as being covered head to toe in a reddish or dark brown hair, standing taller than the average man and exuding a foul, skunk-like stench.

FIRST SIGHTED
1830s

LOCATION
California

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Hairy biped hominid/hybrid-humanoid

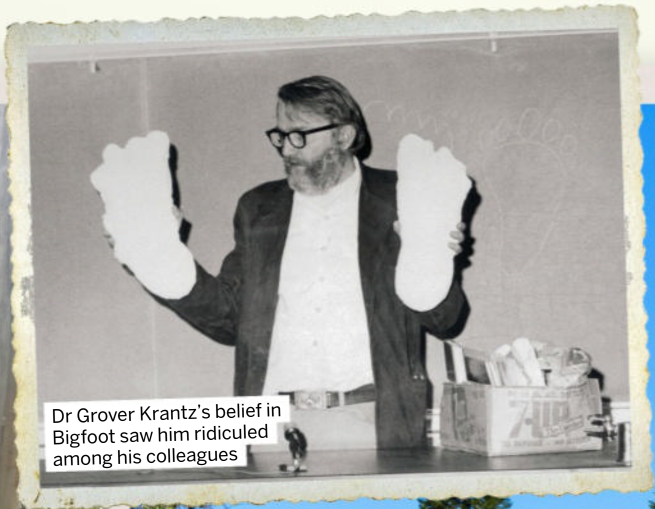
Bigfoot Behaviour

Bigfoot mostly avoid human contact and flee if they spot an onlooker. They are rarely said to be excessively aggressive, although they can be dangerous if provoked. Bigfoot can, however, be a territorial creature and known to throw rocks when it feels threatened or to communicate. Further communication attempts have been noted through 'wood knocking' (striking trees loudly with sticks or rocks) and by leaving gifts, or swapping items left by humans with offerings. It is also reported that Bigfoot build 'nests', weaving plant fibres and building conical structures out of dead trees and leaves and even suspending deer skeletons to ward off intruders – a collection of nests were discovered in Washington state and determined to be created by a primate by experts.

It is likely that, as with most primate species, Bigfoot are omnivores – they have been known to hunt deer, salmon, elk and rabbit, as well as consume berries, nuts and other snacks that hikers have left behind. While they have occasionally been sighted in groups, Bigfoot are a relatively solitary species – perhaps due to lacking numbers – but appear to have their own language, vocalising in various ways including moans, grunts, whistles, screams and howls. Some

> THEY ARE RARELY SAID TO BE EXCESSIVELY AGGRESSIVE, ALTHOUGH THEY CAN BE DANGEROUS IF PROVOKED

Go deep into the forests of North America to catch a glimpse of a Bigfoot – but remember they are protected!



Dr Grover Krantz's belief in Bigfoot saw him ridiculed among his colleagues

MUSEUM
WILLOW CREEK - CHINA FLAT

Bigfoot is big tourism across the States ,with museums, tours and mech galore

researchers believe Bigfoot can produce infrasound, a low-frequency sound that is out of human auditory range but has been reported in nature.

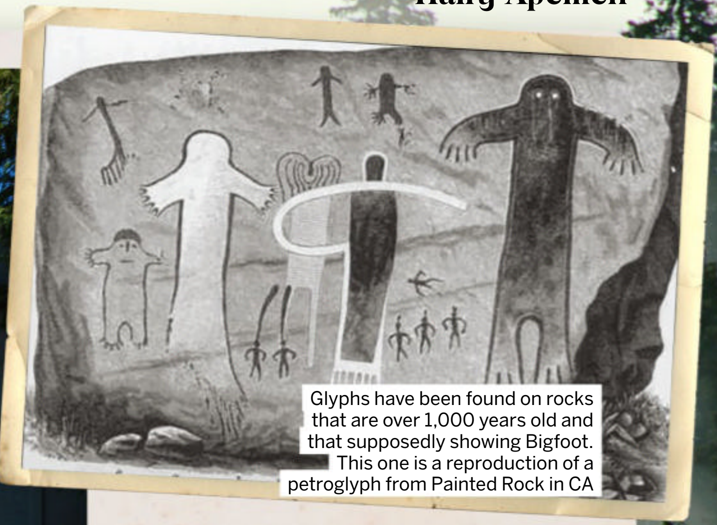
The O.G. Bigfoot

While the term 'Bigfoot' is prescribed to pretty much any hairy wild apeman sighted in the world these days, it was actually only introduced in the 1950s when a group of logging company workers discovered large human-like footprints in the mud at a construction site in Six Rivers National Forest, Northern California. One of these 41-centimetre (16-inch) footprints – belonging to the O.G. Bigfoot, if you will – was cast in plaster and taken to the office of local newspaper, *The Humboldt Times*, by construction worker, Jerry Crew. Reporter Andrew Genzoli dubbed the tracks "Bigfoot" in his interview with the lumber workers, who reported heavy objects moving mysteriously and local tales of hairy wild men. The story caught on, reaching national tabloids and spreading the legend – and the Bigfoot name – across the globe. Subsequently, Willow Creek and Humboldt County have become known as the 'Bigfoot Capital of the World'. However, in 2002 it was revealed that the original Bigfoot tracks were actually a hoax. Jerry Crew's co-worker, Ray Wallace, had made the tracks himself with gigantic wooden feet in an attempt to scare away thieves. Wallace acquired his collection of carved feet from Rant Mullens, a hoaxer from his hometown of Toledo, Washington, who had used the same tactic to create his own Bigfoot prints in the 1930s. In 1982, Mullens admitted that he and a group of other foresters had used the tracks to scare off huckleberry pickers in Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Mullens and his pals also took credit for an incident on the southeast shoulder of Mount St. Helens in 1924 when a group of gold prospectors were allegedly attacked by 2.1-metre (seven-foot) ape-like creatures. The prospectors reported that the apes throttled their cabin with boulders and left gigantic footprints after one of the gold-diggers shot and injured one of the beasts with his rifle and the creature tumbled into a canyon. The gorge has since been dubbed Ape Canyon.

Caught On Camera!

In 1967 Bigfoot hit the headlines once again – this time it was thanks to filmmakers Roger Patterson and Robert Gimlin. The duo claimed to have encountered the hairy hominid – a female dubbed 'Patty' – taking a stroll in Bluff Creek, Northern California – on 20 October, while setting out to film a short docudrama about a group

A big trap set for a Bigfoot



Glyphs have been found on rocks that are over 1,000 years old and that supposedly showing Bigfoot. This one is a reproduction of a petroglyph from Painted Rock in CA

> THE 952 FRAMES OF FOOTAGE ARE PERHAPS THE MOST CONVINCING AND MOST INFAMOUS EVIDENCE OF BIGFOOT TO DATE

of cowboys searching for the legendary beast. When Patty spooked Patterson's horse, he quickly grabbed his 16mm Cine Kodak K100 camera and filmed her. While the resulting short only lasts 39.7 seconds and doesn't feature any cowboys, or any storyline at all, it has gone down in history as something far more significant than any budget Western. The 952 frames of footage are perhaps the most convincing and most infamous evidence of Bigfoot to date, and are responsible for publicising the legend outside of North America. However, many sceptics believe that it is an elaborate hoax featuring a man in a suit, possibly created by *Planet Of The Apes* special effects makeup artist, John Chambers. Chambers, Patterson and Gimlin have all fervently denied this accusation, with Patterson claiming that the flick was real until his death in 1972 (although he was a known fraudster). Gimlin still outright claims it wasn't faked (despite years of ridicule and not making one cent of money off of the film) and no experts have been able to fully debunk the footage as a fabrication, even over 50 years on. Professor of anatomy and anthropology at Idaho State University, Jeffery Meldrum, is one of the few academics to openly study Sasquatch and he believes the footage could very well be real, although until there is a body or DNA evidence it will always be up for debate. He points out that the Oscar-winning costumes used in 1968's *Planet Of The Apes* might have been advanced for the day, but their anatomic realism is unimpressive in comparison to the 'costume' in Patterson-Gimlin's amateur budget footage. But it wasn't just video evidence that was captured by Patterson and Gimlin that day, they also took photographs of Patty's footprints and later cast the tracks. According to Bigfoot expert and co-host of Animal Planet's *Finding Bigfoot* television series, Cliff Barackman, who boasts one of the largest Bigfoot footprint collections in the world, the Patterson-Gimlin footprints exhibit a distinctive foot mobility – with a distinct pressure ridge that indicates a very flexible mid-foot – something Barackman has seen in other allegedly genuine Bigfoot prints.

Bigfoot Breakthroughs

In the past 60-plus years, there have been a steady stream of Bigfoot sightings across the USA, numerous footprint discoveries, a few recordings of vocalisations, occasional fuzzy photos or poor-quality videos, a handful of somatic samples but no solid, indisputable evidence of its existence. Eyewitness accounts and photographs are regularly attributed to misidentified bears, who inhabit the same wilderness that the allusive ape has been spotted in, or escaped apes from zoos, circuses or exotic pets. Analysis of vocalisations has often been inconclusive, but many of the sounds are consistent with known species, such as owls, wolves, coyotes, foxes or even humans.

In 1976 the FBI opened a file on Bigfoot. Cryptozoologist and director of the Bigfoot Information Center and Exhibition in The Dalles, Oregon, sent the bureau a sample of hairs attached to a very small piece of skin that he believed belonged to the allusive hominid. Assistant director of the FBI's scientific and technical services division, Jay Cochran Jr, looked into the specimen "in the interest of research and scientific inquiry", but, unfortunately, his scientific analysis concluded that the hairs belonged to a species of deer.

In 2000, a team from the Bigfoot Field Research Organisation (BFRO) claimed

Harry And The Hendersons is just one of many pop culture references to Bigfoot

With the wilderness disappearing, how long will Bigfoot have somewhere to hide?

BEWARE
BIGFOOT
IN AREA

Head to Bigfoot country and you will see evidence of its presence everywhere!

> DESPITE HOAXES AND VERY LITTLE DEFINITIVE PROOF OF ITS EXISTENCE, TODAY OVER TEN PERCENT OF AMERICANS BELIEVE BIGFOOT IS REAL

to find an imprint of a large primate's left forearm, hip, thigh and heel in a muddy wallow near Mt. Adams in Washington. A cast was made, dubbed 'Bigfoot's Butt Print' or the 'Skookum cast', which measured a whopping one metre by 1.5 metres (three-and-a-half by five feet) and weighed 91 kilograms (200 pounds). In 2006, Paleontologist Anton Wroblewski identified the cast as being made by a cervid, most likely an elk.

In 2014, Oxford University geneticist, Bryan Sykes, conducted a study on 36 hair samples allegedly belonging to Bigfoot, Sasquatch, Yeti and similar ape-like creatures. Through genetic analysis his team was able to determine that all the specimens belonged to known species – cows, deers, racoons and humans. Two of the 36 samples closely matched an extinct Palaeolithic polar bear, indicating they could have come from an unknown bear species or a hybrid of modern bears. In 2023, a BBC documentary analysed the DNA of hair claimed to be from a Yeti (Bigfoot's Himalayan cousin, see p56) but concluded it was in fact from a horse.

Other somatic samples attributed to Bigfoot have similarly been found to belong to other, known species, or come back inconclusive. The popular Animal Planet show, *Finding Bigfoot*, ran for seven years, without ever actually finding the titular beast. Similarly, Spike TV's *10 Million Dollar Bigfoot Bounty* never had to pay out a cent of the reward money it promised contestants if they could discover scientific proof of the wild ape. And to date, no bones or bodies have ever been found. With less and less wilderness left in the West for such a large species to survive and thrive in, it becomes all the more likely that Bigfoot – if a creature ever did exist – is perhaps yet another species to have gone extinct.

Bigfoot Buffs

Despite countless hoaxes and very little definitive proof of its existence, today over ten percent of Americans believe Bigfoot is real. And our fascination for the giant ape has never faltered – he's a cultural icon.

Hunting for them is known as 'Squatching' (derived from the Canadian term for the apeman, Sasquatch – see page 51). Many states have protection orders on Bigfoot, as it's an endangered species, so if you do find one, treat 'em nice!

Many states also hold annual Bigfoot festivals (including California, Colorado, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Washington and Oregon) and Ohio even runs its own Bigfoot Conference.

Shawnee National Forest

Mount Rainier National Park

THE HUNT FOR BIGFOOT USA

Bigfoot is easily the most infamous cryptid in the world. These gigantic Neanderthal-like apemen with a skunk-like stench have been spotted all over North America for centuries. Such is the plausibility of their existence, millions of people worldwide are convinced they are going about their business in the forests of America, leading to a booming business of Bigfoot hunts – or 'Squatching'. If you think you have what it takes to find evidence of this elusive creature and fancy yourself a 'squatcher', there are a few locations you might want to investigate...

Everglades National Park

1 Washington

The most active state for Bigfoot activity, particularly in Pierce County.

HOT SPOTS: Mount Rainier National Park, The North Cascades, Ape Canyon, Olympic National Park.

2 California

Humboldt County is dubbed the Bigfoot capital of the world.

HOT SPOTS: Six Rivers National Forest (Willow Creek; Bluff Creek), Redwoods State Park, Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation, Lake Shore Forest Service Campground.

3 Florida

Known as the Skunk Ape here, sightings have been reported throughout the Everglades.

HOT SPOTS: Collier County (Everglades National Park and Big Cypress National Preserve).

4 Ohio

Known as the Grassman, the infamous 'Ohio Howl' recordings were heard in Columbiana County.

HOT SPOTS: Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Mogadore Reservoir, West Branch State Park, Audubon wildlife preserve, Pleasant Hill Lake Park, Salt Fork State Park.

5 Illinois

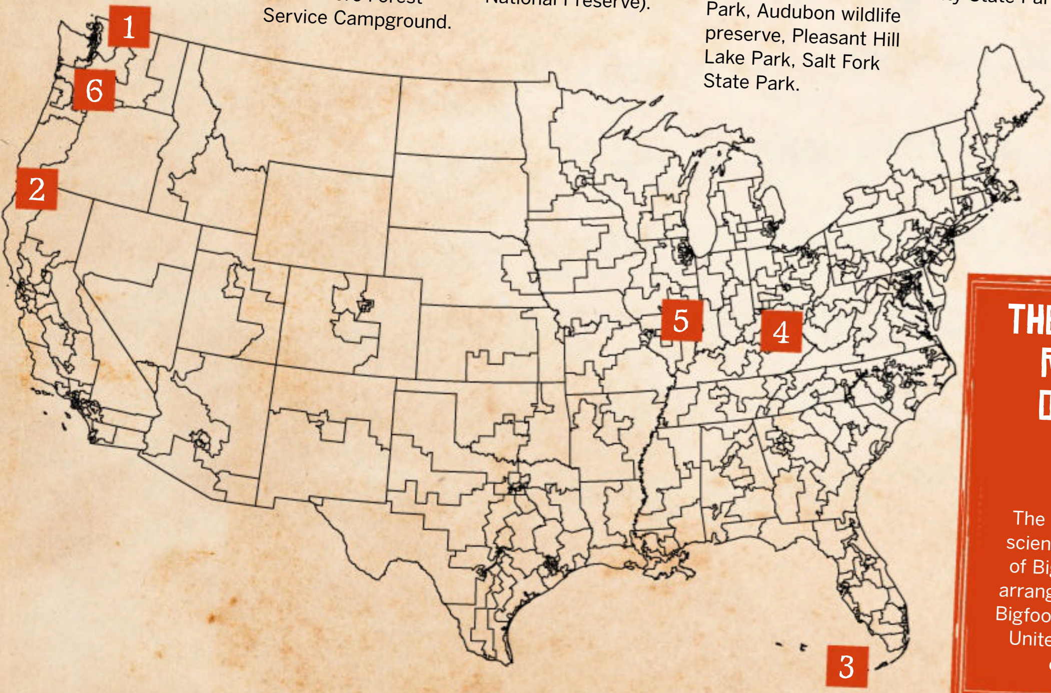
Jackson and Madison Counties have seen their fair share of Sasquatch sightings.

HOT SPOTS: Shawnee National Forest (Garden of the Gods Wilderness), Big Muddy River, Giant City State Park.

6 Oregon

The Oregon Bigfoot Festival and the North American Bigfoot Center are located in Boring.

HOT SPOTS: The Bigfoot trap on the Collings Mountain hiking trail in the Rogue River–Siskiyou National Forest, Mount Hood National Forest (Salmon Huckleberry Wilderness).



THE BIGFOOT FIELD RESEARCHERS ORGANIZATION [BFRO]

www.bfro.net

The BFRO is devoted to the scientific study and research of Bigfoot. The organisation arranges group expeditions to Bigfoot hotspots all across the United States, and they are open to everyone!

KNOW YOUR BIGFOOT!

Bigfoot isn't always known as Bigfoot, in fact, while this term has been adopted by the world and has come to mean any ape-like creature spotted in America, these cryptids take on a variety of guises across the United States. In Florida (and some Southern states) Bigfoot is known as the Skunk Ape thanks to its putrid stench, while Ohio dubs it the less revolting Grassman, Virginians refer to it as the Wood Booger, West Virginians prefer the term 'The Old Men of the Mountain' and folks in southern Illinois have named it the Big Muddy Monster. However, these particular relatives of Bigfoot have caused quite a stir in their local communities, earning them some rather infamous nicknames.

BOGGY CREEK MONSTER

FOUKE, ARKANSAS

Also known as the Fouke Monster or Swamp Stalker, this nocturnal, red-eyed bipedal creature was first spotted in the 1850s. During the 1940s it was spotted in the region of Jonesville, and then in the 1970s, when it allegedly attacked the home of a local couple. Unlike primates, its tracks are said to have only three toes. The town holds an annual Fouke Monster Festival in April.

MOMO THE MONSTER

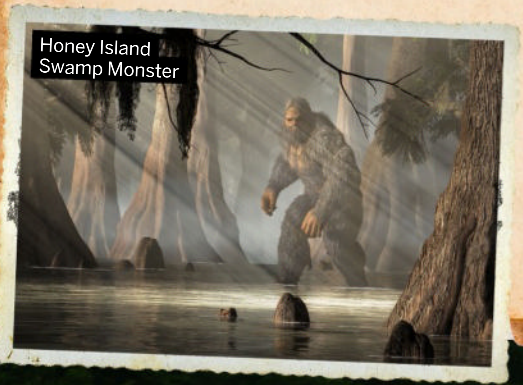
PIKE COUNTY, MISSOURI

Sighted in the 1970s in rural Louisiana, the Missouri Monster (Momo) was described as dark with a large pumpkin-shaped head and orange glowing eyes. The creature was spotted by the local fire department chief and member of the city council in 1972 and a 20-person search party was formed, but found nothing.

MOGOLLON MONSTER

MOGOLLON RIM, ARIZONA

Standing at 2.1m (7ft) tall, this cousin of Bigfoot is a little on the short size (many Wood Apes are reported to be 3m (10ft tall)). It might be small but it sure is mighty, being described as territorial and violent. Like other Bigfoots, it smells terrible, is covered in reddish or black hair and sports red eyes. It can mimic known wildlife, is nocturnal, omnivorous, builds large nests and ejects a blood-curdling screech. The forest is said to go still and silent before it approaches...



Honey Island Swamp Monster

Mogollon Monster

HONEY ISLAND SWAMP MONSTER

ST TAMMANY PARISH, LOUISIANA

Also known as the Cajun Sasquatch and La Bête Noire ('The Black Beast'), this putrid-smelling grey-haired ape has yellow or red eyes and only four toes. It prefers the swampy habitat of the bayous and local legend claims the monster is the result of the environmental evolutionary adaptation of circus chimpanzees who were lost into Honey Island swamp thanks to a train crash in the early 20th century.

DEWEY LAKE MONSTER

DOWAGIAC, MICHIGAN

Also known as the Sister Lakes Sasquatch, this 3m (10ft) ape creature with glowing eyes was first spotted in June 1964 by several residents near Dewey Lake and Sisters Lakes. The sighting caused a flurry of eager monster hunters to descend upon Sister Lakes and led to Chicago newspapers dubbing it "Monster Town USA".

WILD MAN OF THE NAVIDAD

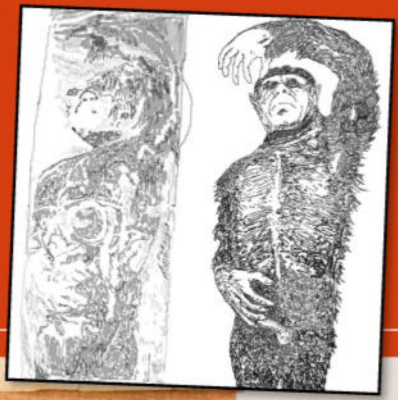
SUBLIME, TEXAS

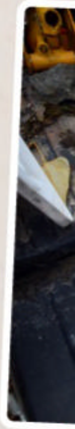
One of the earliest accounts of alleged Bigfoot sightings comes from Lavaca County, Texas, in 1837 when a series of bizarre nighttime robberies occurred throughout the early settlements along the Navidad River. Food would vanish, tools would be taken only to be returned polished and guard dogs didn't alert households to the intruder. No valuables were ever taken. Slaves dubbed it 'The Thing That Comes', and it was described as a nimble hair-covered man. A hunt was carried out and a so-called 'wildman' was trapped, but nobody knows if he was the true culprit, or even a wildman at all.

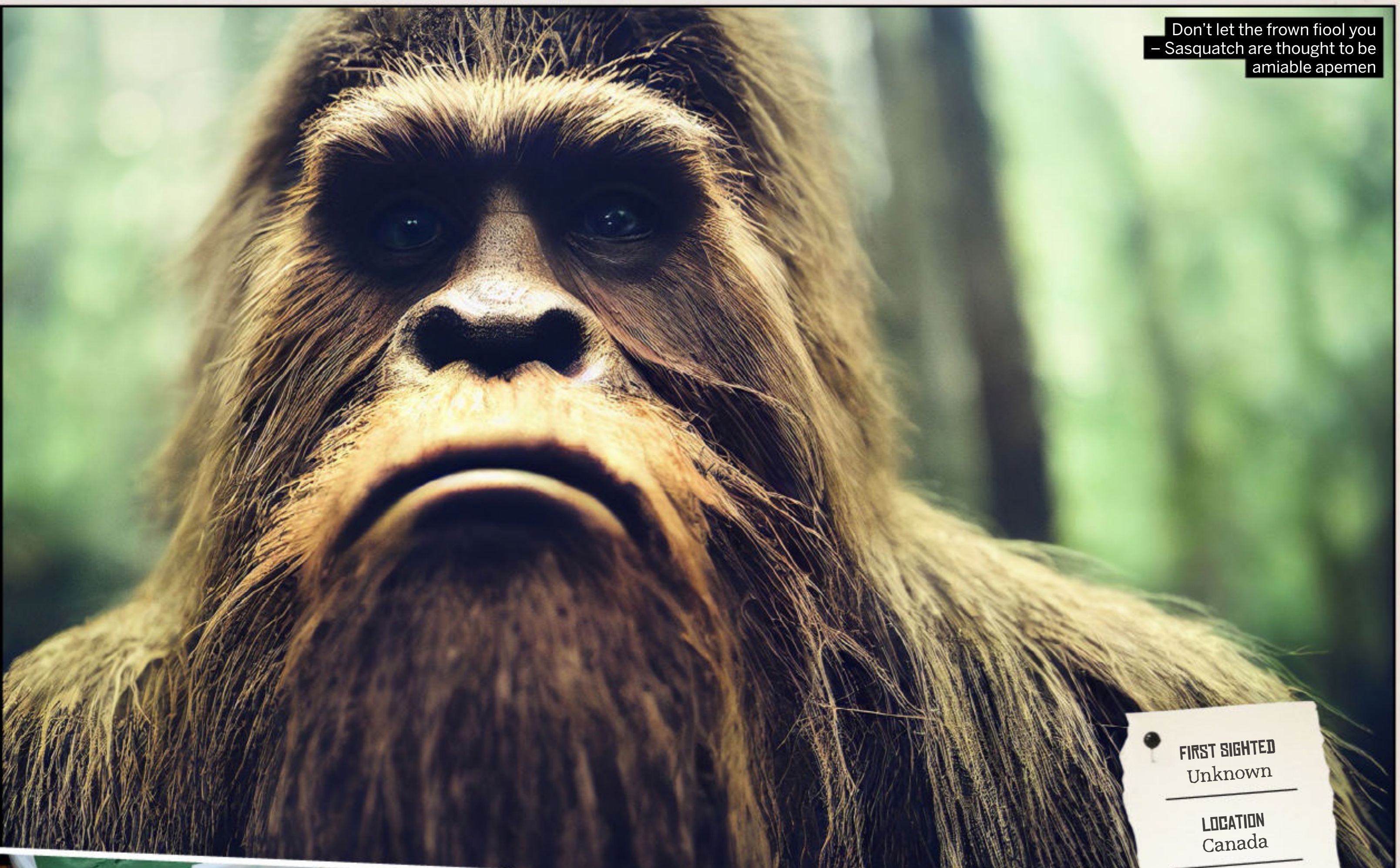
MINNESOTA ICEMAN

MUSEUM OF THE WEIRD
AUSTIN, TEXAS

This sideshow exhibit of a Bigfoot-looking, 1.8m (6ft) tall, dark and hairy hominid frozen in a block of ice did the rounds during the 1960s and 1970s across the US and Canada. Promoted as the 'missing link' between man and Neanderthals, he was discovered to be a hoax made of latex and hair. He was featured on the infamous television show, *Unsolved Mysteries*, in 1994 and is now on display at the Museum of the Weird if you'd like to see him.







Don't let the frown fiool you – Sasquatch are thought to be amiable apemen

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Canada

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

SUSPECTED SPECIES:
Hominid/hybrid-hominoid

Various casts thought to be made by Sasquatch

SASQUATCH

Sasquatch is Bigfoot's friendlier Canadian cousin. The term 'Sasquatch' is an Anglesised version of the name the First Nations of British Columbia gave the red-eyed, human-faced, gorilla-like Bigfoot creature who has been sighted across North America since ancient times. In 1884, Sasquatch caught the attention of the *British Colonist* newspaper in Victoria, Canada, who reported on a "gorilla type" beast that had been caught in the area. From then on numerous alleged sightings were reported, but most were decried as hoaxes. In 1929, Canadian government agent, JW Burns, published a magazine article entitled 'Introducing B.C.'s Hairy Giants', introducing Sasquatch to the nation. Then, in the 1950s, thanks to the *Humboldt Times*' article on the California Bigfoot, interest in its cousin Sasquatch increased once again.

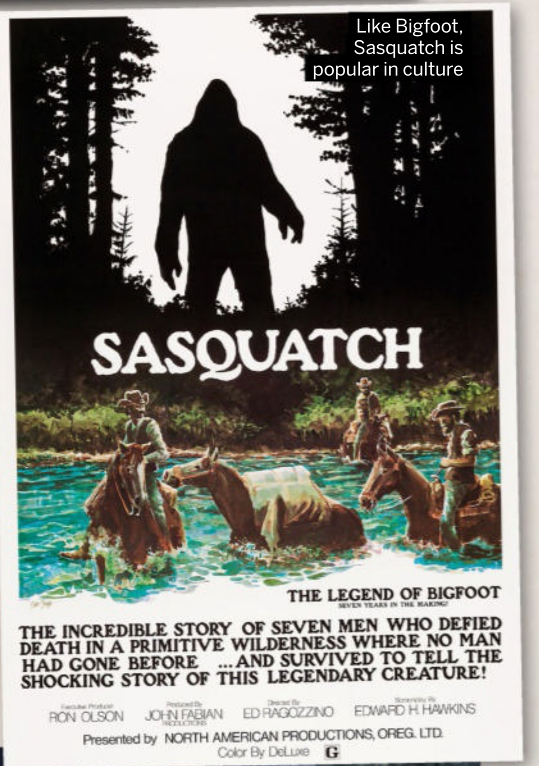
According to one 2016 poll, 26 percent of Canadians believe that Sasquatch is likely lurking in their country. Like fellow Canucks – known for their friendly nature – Sasquatch is comparatively outgoing among cryptids, with many Canadians reporting that they wouldn't be surprised to bump into one while changing their tyre on a forest drive. The hairy humanoid may well be just a hitherto undocumented primate, some say. For members of the Sts'ailes First Nation, however – in whose drawings he's popped up for thousands of years – the truth is more complex. They believe that the Sasquatch is not merely an animal, but a physical manifestation of our

Twenty-six Canadians think they might bump into a Sasquatch in their country

SINCE 1900, THERE HAVE BEEN 37 NOTABLE SIGHTINGS OF THE HAIRY BIPED IN OR NEAR THE SLEEPY TOWN OF HARRISON HOT SPRINGS IN BC

Earth, a 'Slollicum', a shapeshifter who can move between the physical and the spiritual realms at will. While they can be dangerous, seeing one is said to be good luck.

Since 1900, there have been 37 notable sightings of the hairy biped in or near the sleepy town of Harrison Hot Springs in BC, the Sasquatch capital of Canada. In 1969, the nearby Green Point Park was renamed Sasquatch Park in honour of the elusive neighbour and in 2017, the town opened a Sasquatch Museum inside its visitor centre, where you can learn all about the Sts'ailes tribe's beliefs, check out casts of Sasquatch footprints and peruse a logbook full of reported local encounters. It's also been said that the Sasquatch gather once a year for their own 'meeting' nearby. But for those not invited, wannabe squatchers can follow the Sasquatch trail or attend Sasquatch Days, which have been held every June since 1938, where West Coast First Nations celebrate Sasquatch with canoe races, salmon barbeques and traditional dances.


SASQUATCH
THE LEGEND OF BIGFOOT
SEVEN YEARS IN THE MAKING!
THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF SEVEN MEN WHO DEFIED DEATH IN A PRIMITIVE WILDERNESS WHERE NO MAN HAD GONE BEFORE ...AND SURVIVED TO TELL THE SHOCKING STORY OF THIS LEGENDARY CREATURE!
RON OLSON
JOHN FABIAN
ED RAGOZZINO
EDWARD H HAWKINS
Presented by NORTH AMERICAN PRODUCTIONS, OREG. LTD.
Color By DeLuxe
G

Like Bigfoot, Sasquatch is popular in culture

WARNING!
PLEASE DO NOT FEED THE SASQUATCH

Like the Bigfoot signs in the US, Canada is scattered with Sasquatch advice

THE FOUR HORSEMAN OF SASQUATCHERY

These four devoted researchers led the hunt for Bigfoot for over 50 years

PETER CYRIL BYRNE

1925-2023

Irish WWII veteran, explorer, author and conservationist, Peter Byrne led expeditions to find the Yeti in the 1950s, later moving to the USA to trace Bigfoot, publishing 20 books journaling his explorations in nature, and his hunt for Bigfoot, the Yeti and other cryptids.

RENÉ DAHINDEN

1930-2001

Swiss-born Sasquatch researcher Dahinden devoted his life to finding evidence of the hairy apeman after moving to Canada in 1953, collaborating frequently with John Green. Dahinden inspired the Bigfoot hunter character Jacques LaFleur, played by David Suchet, in the 1987 cult classic, *Harry And The Hendersons.*

JOHN GREEN

1927-2016

Canadian journalist John Green compiled a database of more than 3,000 sightings and track reports, becoming interested in the creature after meeting Dahinden in 1957. The two worked together to collect witness statements and share alleged sightings. In 1963, he was elected mayor of Canada's Sasquatch capital, and his hometown, Harrison Hot Springs.

GROVER KRANTZ

1931-2002

American anthropologist Grover Krantz was one of very few scientists who researched and believed in Bigfoot, convinced after analysing the 1969 'Cripplefoot' plaster casts of alleged Bigfoot tracks found in Washington.

YOWIE

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

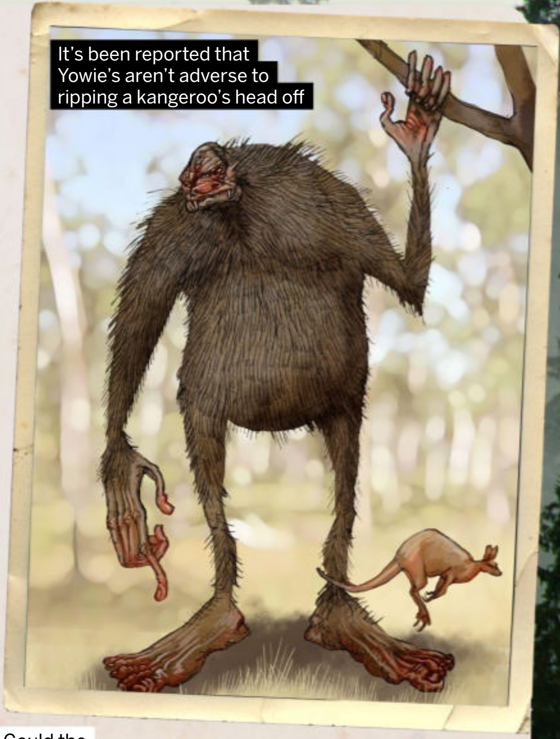
LOCATION
Australia

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

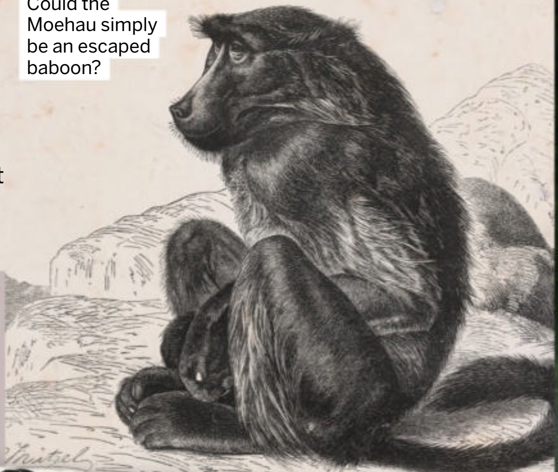
SUSPECTED SPECIES:
Hairy biped hominid/hybrid-hominoid, generally shorter than the North American Bigfoot

In Australia, Bigfoot is most commonly known as Yowie. Although, just like its American cousin, Yowie has many, many names including Quinkin, Joogabinna, Ghindaring, Doolaga, Noocoonah, and more. Just like the native tribes of North America, large bipedal hairy hominid creatures are common in the legends of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. The name 'Yowie' was first documented in 1875, and described a nocturnal spirit. But sightings of 'indigenous apes' have been reported by settlers as early as 1795. Amateur naturalist Henry James McCooey claimed to have seen one of these creatures in the 1880s on the south coast of New South Wales, describing it as approximately 1.5-metres (five-foot) tall, with long black hair covering most of its body, apart from the chest area – which was covered in red hair. Sightings in New South Wales continued into the 20th century, but it is the Springbrook region of Queensland that has had more Yowie reports than anywhere else in Australia. Former Queensland Senator Bill O'Chee revealed he had seen a Yowie while on a school trip in Springbrook, comparing the creature to Chewbacca from *Star Wars* and claiming it was over three metres (nine feet) in height.

Descriptions of the Yowie vary – they range in height from 1.5 metres to 3.6 metres (five foot to 12), their footprints differ in number of toes and sometimes their nose is described as wide and flat. Some reports suggest that Yowie are timid, yet others indicate they are aggressive and even sometimes violent – attacking pet dogs and tearing the heads off kangeroos. Aboriginal legends describe the Yowie as having talon-like claws and many report two large fang-like canines. Some cryptozoologists theorise that the Yowie could in fact be an undiscovered bipedal marsupial, such as a descendant of the Papa New Guinean extinct species Hulitherium, as there are no native primates to Australia in the fossil record.


It's been reported that Yowie's aren't adverse to ripping a kangeroo's head off

The Yowie is generally described as shorter than Bigfoot, but a tad more aggressive


Could the Moehau simply be an escaped baboon?

THE MOEHAU

The Moehau is said to inhabit the Moehau mountain range of New Zealand's North Island, and is either a descendant of the supernatural wild men of the woods, the Maero, or the escaped pet baboon of a retired sailor. In the 1970s, it was claimed that the Moehau was simply a joke.

Could a primate dwell in the Coromandel-Moehau mountains?

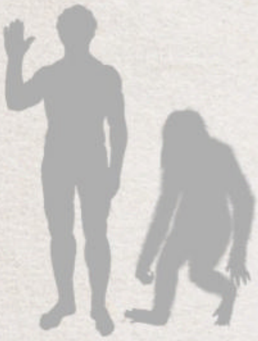
ORANG PENDEK

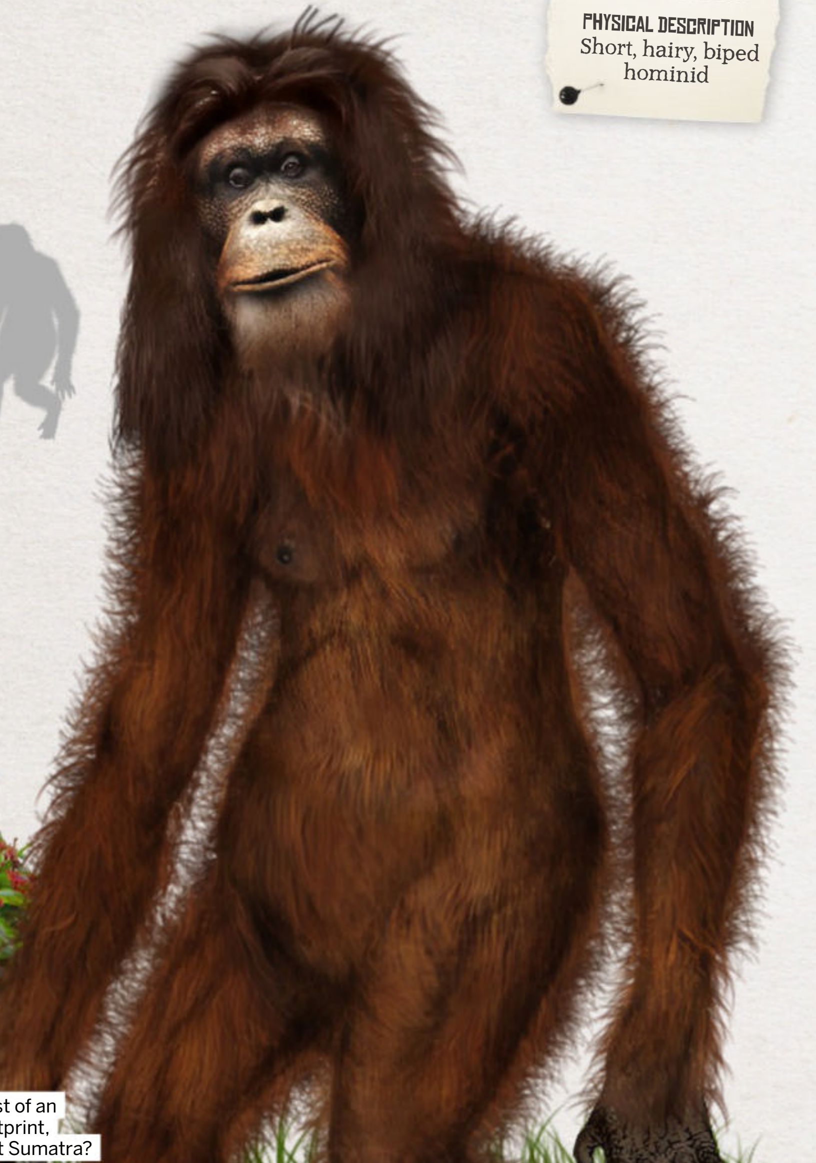
FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Indonesia

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Short, hairy, biped hominid





Uncovering the evidence for this compact creature

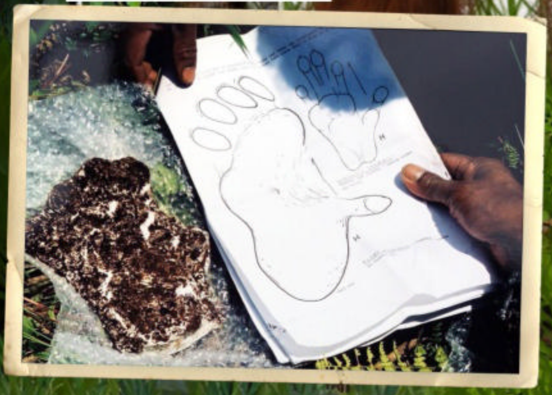
The Orang Pendek, Indonesian for 'short people', are a race of 76- to 152-centimetre (30- to 60-inch) tall, bipedal ground-dwelling primates that are said to inhabit the remote mountainous forests of West Sumatra, most of which have remained relatively unexplored. The native islanders have told stories of the Orang Pendek and similar creatures for centuries, emerging from the depths of Kerinci Seblat National Park to raid sugarcane crops. Dutch colonists from the early 20th century also reported witnessing this unknown species of primate.

These stocky hominids are said to have incredible strength, with the ability to uproot small trees and break rattan vines, but not a whole lot of intellect. Despite their strength, the Orang Pendek aren't generally aggressive creatures, preferring to avoid human interaction and only lashing out when threatened. They are said to make crude tools and weapons out of sticks and stones and favour a diet of ginger plants and rattan shoots. Visually, they are described as being very broad and muscular across the chest, covered in dark brown or black hair flecked with grey (although some report honey or reddish hair and, occasionally, a lighter patch of hair on their chests) with a longer, darker 'mane' of head hair falling to their shoulders or below, in a similar fashion to humans. Their large torso is contrasted by short, slim legs and small human-like feet, their arms – like a human's – reach to their knee when upright.

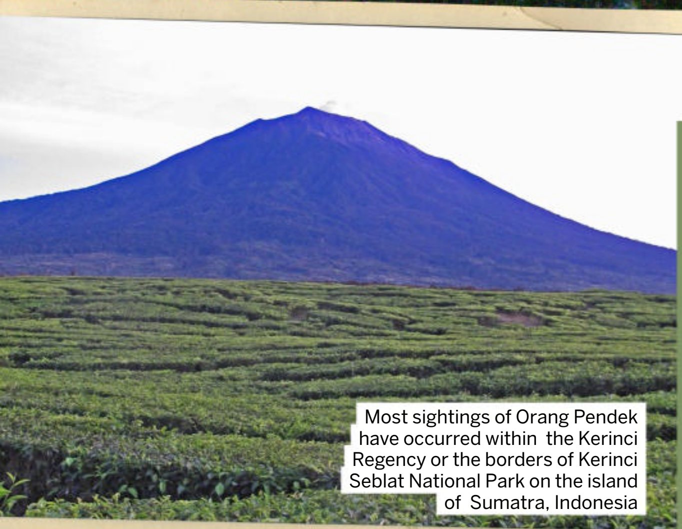
Their head is often reported to slope into a crest like a gorilla, while their facial features have been described by one Dutch settler in 1923 as "nothing repulsive or ugly" yet also not at all "apelike" – there is often a gorilla-like bony ridge above the eyes, their mouth is small and neat, eyes wide apart and noise distinctly humanoid. When frightened, the Orang Pendek exposes its teeth like a chimpanzee, but reveals broad incisors and prominent canines.

There have been many scientific expeditions onto the island in search of the elusive creature, including a National Geographic funded project, tracks have been discovered along with eyewitness accounts but no concrete DNA evidence has emerged. Cryptozoologists Debbie Martyr and Jeremy Holden searched for the Orang Pendek for 15 years, beginning in the 1990s, and although they never

Could this be a cast of an Orang Pendek footprint, discovered in West Sumatra?



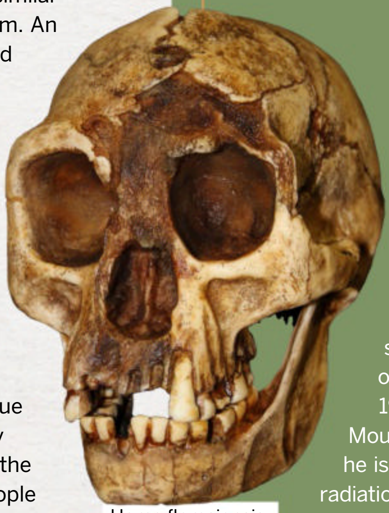
Could the Orang Pendek be a relict population of the thought to be extinct archaic species of human, Homo floresiensis?



Most sightings of Orang Pendek have occurred within the Kerinci Regency or the borders of Kerinci Seblat National Park on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia

managed to snap a photograph, they claim to have seen one themselves, describing it as "built like a boxer, with immense upper body strength" and moving bipedally through the forest, avoiding being seen by humans.

In 2011, a team of researchers led by cryptozoologist Richard Freeman, found a handprint with a round palm, a short thumb and sausage-like fingers, described as similar to a small gorilla but with a rounder palm. An expert at Cambridge University analysed the cast and found no match with any known primate species. The group also discovered hairs which, upon DNA analysis, were reported as belonging to a previously undocumented species of primate. Further findings, however, have claimed that hairs previously attributed to the Orang Pendek have actually been proven to belong to a tapir. Many sceptics believe sightings are misidentified orangutans, or perhaps a species of orangutan unique to the area. However, some believe they could be surviving Homo floresiensis – the now-thought extinct 'hobbit' race of people known to have inhabited the nearby Indonesian island of Flores approximately 50,000 years ago, described as up to 1.2-metres (four-foot) tall, with prominent shoulders and short legs, much like the Orang Pendak.



Homo floresiensis: 'Flores Man'; nicknamed 'hobbit'

THE ORANG KARDIL

Venture even deeper into the jungles of Sumatra, and you may encounter the Orang Kardil, or 'tiny men'. These creatures are described as a miniature race of humans, standing around 0.9m (3ft). They are much smaller and less hairy than the Orang Pendek, in fact they are relatively hairless except for their heads. They are said to hunt the jungles naked with poisoned bamboo spears and are notorious for stealing food.

MORE ASIAN APES

The largest primate on fossil record – and often the attributed ancestor of Bigfoot – the now extinct Gigantopithecus blacki, lived in the forests of what is now Southern China around two million years ago. It's no surprise then that the continent has a long history of legends of ape-like hominid and humanoid creatures believed to still lurk in its many remote, uninhabited areas.

MONKEY MAN OF BUKIT TIMAH

SINGAPORE

This immortal forest-dwelling hominid was first spotted in 1805, but Japanese soldiers during World War II also reported encounters with the creature. He stands around 1.7m (5ft 9in), has greyish hair, the face of a monkey but walks upright like a human.

HIBAGON

JAPAN

Descriptions of the Hibagon differ drastically, from a big-nosed, brown-haired gorilla with dark eyes, to a 1.5m (5ft), black creature sporting white hands and feet. Like Sasquatch, they have a unique, grotesque stench. Most sightings occurred from 1970 to 1982 in the forests of Mount Hiba, and some say he is a result of the atomic radiation left from the nuclear attack on Hiroshima.

ROCK APES

VIETNAM

Spotted by the US troops during the Vietnam War, Rock Apes, also known as 'forest people' vary from 0.9m to 2.1m (3-7ft) in height, are very muscular and have similar hair colouring and distribution to any other monkey or ape. However, they are very violent when provoked and reportedly would yell and shake their fists at the American soldiers, understandably.

ALMAS

MOUNTAINS OF CENTRAL ASIA AND MONGOLIA

These bipedal humanoids have flat-faced features like a human and are covered in thick black fur. They are supposedly fearsome creatures that boast enormous strength and have feet armed with gigantic claws. Some believe they are a relict population of Neanderthals, but DNA analysis of 'Alma' hair samples have all been found to belong to known, living species.

CHUCHUNYA

SIBERIA

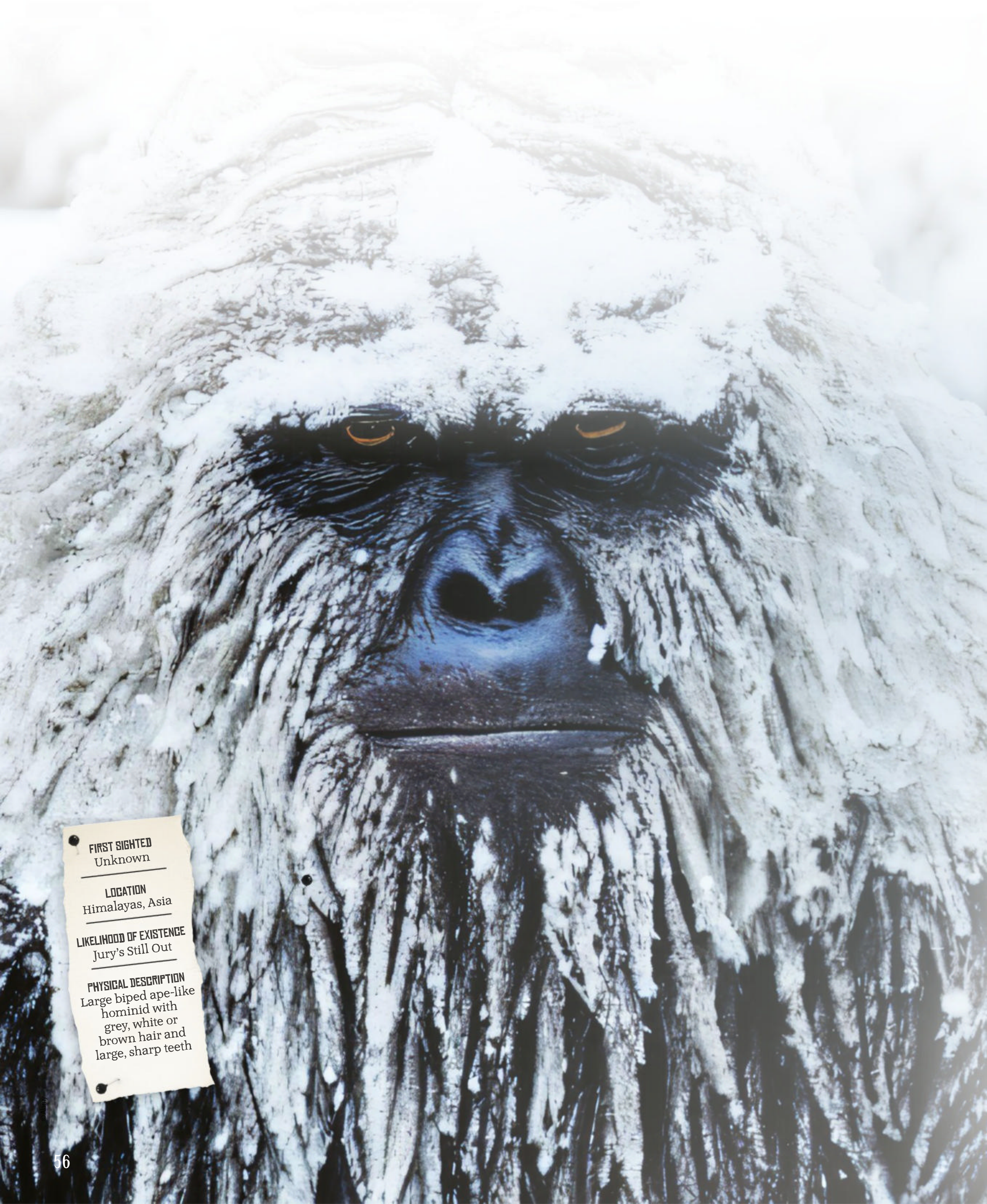
Also known as the Siberian Snowman, the Chuchunya is a 1.8m to 2.1m (6-7ft) Neanderthal-looking hominid with broad shoulders, a prominent brow, long, matted head hair and body hair. They often wear animal skins as clothing and have been known to raid dwellings and barns and even been driven to consume human flesh. In 1928, the Soviet Government reacted to reported sightings of these wild men, sending a team of researchers into the upper regions of the Indigirka and Yana Rivers. Sightings have persisted in the region, but considering the climate, if there is a relict population of primitive hominids still dwelling in the barren wilderness of Siberia, it would be almost impossible to reach them.

NITTAEWO

SRI LANKA

This tribe of small Yeti-like cryptids are said to be covered in reddish hair, stand upright and have no tail. The males are 0.9m to 1.2m (3-4ft), with the females being shorter in height than their male counterparts. They boast short, powerful arms with stubby long-clawed hands, of which they use to disembowel their prey. They are said to have been exterminated by the indigenous Vedda people in the 18th century, however sightings have still persisted into the modern day. Despite this, no archeological evidence of their existence has ever been found.

Image © WikiCC; Tim Bertelink; Alamy; Getty Images



FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Himalayas, Asia

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's Still Out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Large biped ape-like hominid with grey, white or brown hair and large, sharp teeth

© Alamy

HUNT FOR THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

For centuries, tales of a wild man of the Himalayas have fascinated humans, but is the Yeti fact or fiction?

High in the Himalayas lurks a monster. A fearsome and rarely seen creature whose name has become legendary – the Yeti. Appearing first in Tibetan folklore, it was in the 1950s that stories of the Yeti, or 'The Abominable Snowman', captured the public's imagination. Thanks to accounts of half-glimpsed figures and strange footprints, expeditions to capture the beast were launched by everyone from mountaineers such as Sir Edmund Hillary, to British tabloid *The Daily Mail*. In the decades since, the mysterious creature continues to fascinate and has inspired children's films, episodes of *Doctor Who* and even a Kate Bush song. In 2013 renowned naturalist and television presenter David Attenborough stated that he believed "the Abominable Snowman may be real". And yet, we still seem no closer to locating the beast. But where do stories of the Yeti come from? And are they fiction… or might there be a grain of truth in them?

"The Roof Of The World"

Stories of the Yeti appear to originate in Himalayan myth. Part of the mountainous region of High Asia, referred to as "The Roof Of The World", the Himalayas have fascinated humans. Stretching across five countries (Nepal, China, India, Pakistan and Bhutan), the mountains are known for their extraordinary heights. Due to their elevation, the Himalayas are a foreboding landscape covered in ice and snow, with many of the highest areas inhospitable to humans. Perhaps it should not be surprising that such an unwelcoming place has given birth to stories of strange creatures.

The folklore of the Himalayan peoples features three main types of Yeti. These are the small Rang Shim Bombo, the Chuti, and the Nyalmo. Other terms include 'Mi-Go', or 'Wild Man'. According to Lee A Weiss in the article 'Man, Yeti, And Mi-Go', belief in the Yeti is "historically and geographically widespread throughout the Himalayas".

The 'Abominable Snowman'

By 1832, naturalist BH Hodgson had lived and worked in India and Nepal for 14 years. That year he submitted a report to the Asiatic Society Of Nepal on the many mammals in the country. But within this document was a rather unusual anecdote. "My shooters were once alarmed in the Kachár by the apparition of a 'wild man'," Hodgson begins, going on to state: "They mistook the creature for a càcodemon or rakshas [demons], and fled from it instead of shooting it. It moved, they said, erectly [and] was covered with long dark hair." Considered by enthusiasts to be the first purported sighting of a Yeti, Hodgson thought the creature was an orangutan. Although the IUCN's Species Survival Commission states that orangutans could once be found all over Southeast Asia, including the Himalayas, it's unlikely that the indigenous peoples hired by Hodgson could have seen one in the 19th century.

Almost a century later, in 1921 the phrase 'the Abominable Snowman' was first coined. According to the *Smithsonian Magazine*, the name was the result of a translation error by a British journalist, Henry Newman. Working in Calcutta, Newman had heard whispers of a British expedition that had found something mysterious in the snow. The expedition, led by Lieutenant Colonel CK Howard-Bury, had uncovered a series of large footprints. Local folklore spoke of a 'Wild Man' and Newman, playing around with different translations, soon coined the phrase 'The Abominable Snowman'. The term caught on and became intrinsically linked with the mysterious creature.

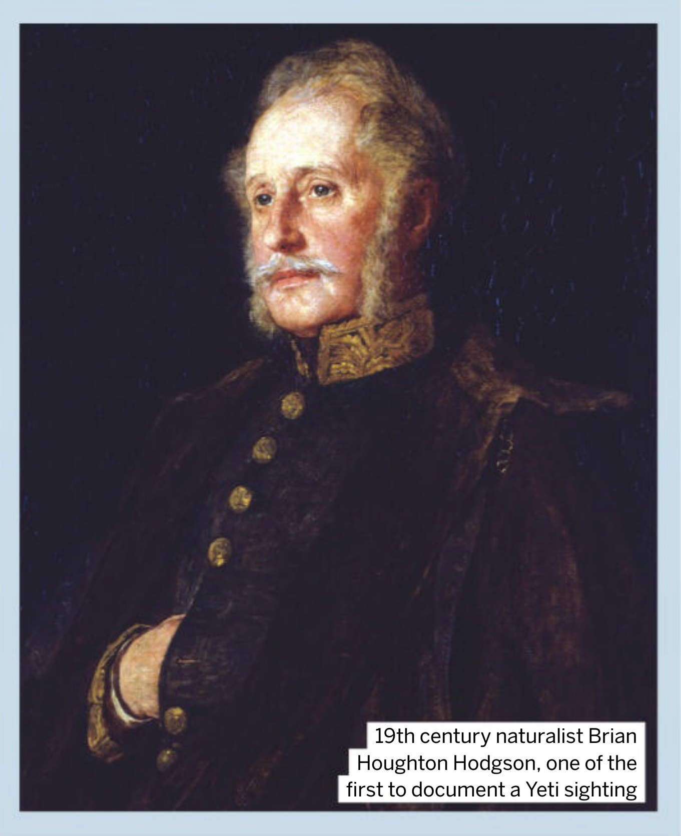
Four years after Newman's clever turn of phrase, at the Zemu Glacier in the Eastern Himalayas in India, the photographer NA Tombazi gave one of the most evocative accounts of the creature. "The figure was exactly like a human being," he began, "walking upright and stopping occasionally to uproot or pull at some bushes. It showed up dark against the snow and as far as I could make out, wore no clothes."

The 1950s and 'Yeti Mania'

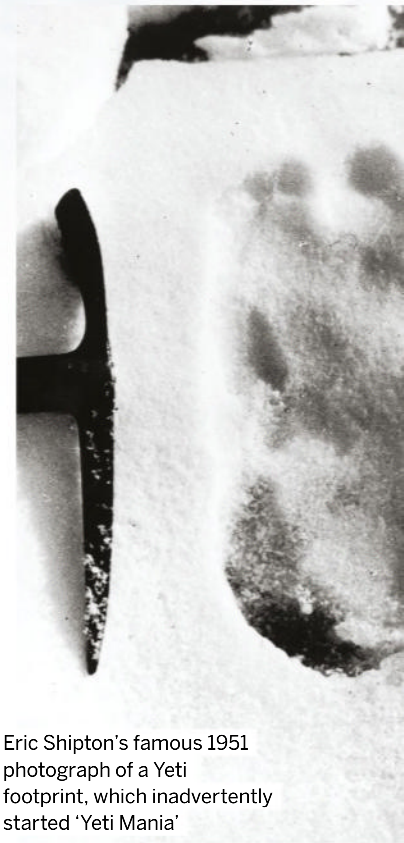
It would be three decades before stories of the Yeti truly captured the public's imagination, though. In 1951, explorers Eric Shipton and Dr Michael Ward launched 'Yeti Mania'. The pair were surveying possible routes to the summit, when they uncovered and photographed a number of unusually large footprints in the snow, placing an ice axe against one to demonstrate its formidable size. Shipton and Ward were not the first to report, let alone photograph such prints, though. In 1944, CR Cooke photographed a number of footprints. Yet, Shipton's photos became the quintessential evidence for the beast, with their vast size and unusual shape, and the media leapt on the story. 'Yeti Mania' had begun.

It did not take long for an expedition to be organised to try finding the creature. In 1954 the British tabloid *The Daily Mail* organised such an enterprise, which cost the equivalent of £1 million today. It was a huge undertaking, comprising a variety of experts and 370 porters. But their intent was not simply to study the beast, they sought to capture it and return to London. If you think this sounds like something straight out of a B-movie, you would not be wrong as the expedition may have partly inspired the teleplay that was adapted into the 1957 Hammer Horror film: *The Abominable Snowman*. However, unlike their cinematic counterparts, the 1954 expedition were not hunted by fearsome monsters – in fact, they found very little.

However, the expedition did return with a small collection of hairs, purportedly from the Pangboche monastery, which was reputed to have a Yeti scalp and also a Yeti hand. They were not alone either, according to a 1961 article in *LIFE* magazine, Yeti 'relics' could also be found in the monasteries of Khumjung and Namche Bazar. However the latter was quickly discovered to be a crude facsimile.



19th century naturalist Brian Houghton Hodgson, one of the first to document a Yeti sighting



Eric Shipton's famous 1951 photograph of a Yeti footprint, which inadvertently started 'Yeti Mania'

Mystery Of The Pangboche Hand

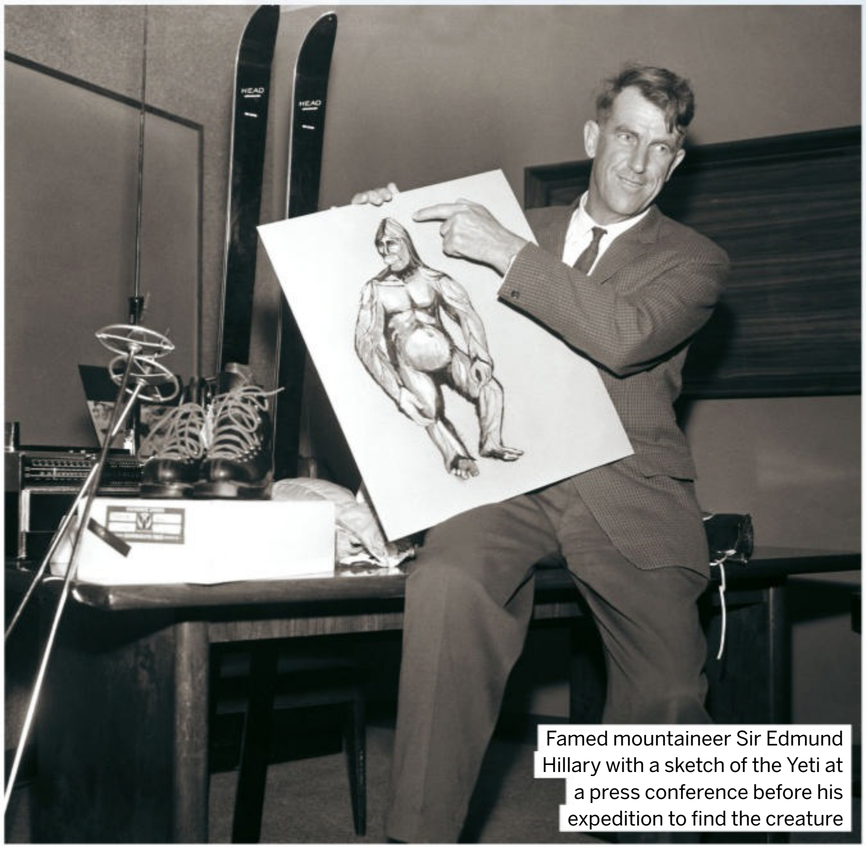
A few years after the *Daily Mail* expedition, the Pangboche Hand became the centre of one of the most lurid Yeti stories. In 1957, one unlikely individual with an interest in the ongoing hunt for the Yeti was Texas oil tycoon and billionaire, Tom Slick. His father had made his fortune in the oil fields of Oklahoma and when he died when Tom was just 14, the young man became extremely wealthy. Slick's interest in the monstrous and mysterious seems to have began when he was a student at Yale as, during a trip to Europe, he enquired after the Loch Ness Monster – though saw nothing. Later in life he would also arrange hunts for legendary creatures such as Bigfoot, and less-known monstrosities such as the Orang Pendek of Sumatra and the giant salamanders of Trinity Alps, Northern California.

"THE FOLKLORE OF THE HIMALAYAN PEOPLES, INCLUDING THE NEPALESE, TIBETANS AND BHUTANESE, FEATURES THREE MAIN DIFFERENT TYPES OF YETI"

However, of all the oil tycoon's monster hunts, it is the search for the Abominable Snowman for which Slick remains most known. In 1957, Slick and his companions discovered even more of what were thought to be Yeti footprints, hair and even excrement. Spurred on by this discovery, Slick funded an even larger expedition the following year, which spent time studying the aforementioned Yeti scalps and hand.

In 1958, Peter Byrne had heard stories of the Pangboche Hand and made his way to the monastery on behalf of Slick. Byrne knew that such an artefact would be priceless if he could get it returned to the United States and scientifically verified. According to Byrne's own account, when the monks refused he made a bargain – he would take a single finger in return for a donation of tens of thousands of rupees (purportedly only around $160 today) and he would also replace the missing finger with a human one. But this is only one version of the story and others, reported by Trafficking Culture, suggest that the finger was taken illicitly.

But whatever the case, Slick and Byrne now faced another problem. How to get the finger out of Nepal? Enter famed Hollywood

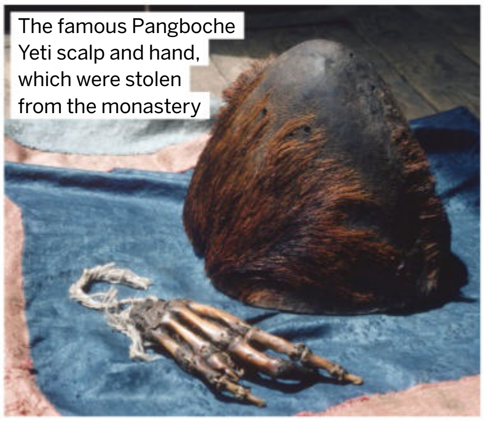


Famed mountaineer Sir Edmund Hillary with a sketch of the Yeti at a press conference before his expedition to find the creature

A Tibetan priest dressed as a Yeti

actor James Stewart, perhaps best known today for his collaborations with master of suspense Alfred Hitchcock in films such as 1948's *Rope* and 1958's *Vertigo*. Stewart was in Calcutta with his wife at the time and Byrne was told by Slick to make his way there and entrust the finger to Stewart. The plan was for Stewart to smuggle the finger to the United Kingdom, where a friend of Slick would be able to submit it to various tests to verify its authenticity. In order to further avoid suspicion, Byrne claims that the finger was secreted in Mrs Stewart's lingerie case.

What happened upon the finger's arrival in the United Kingdom remains a mystery. If indeed it was tested, then the findings were not made public. In the 1990s a tiny portion of finger was rediscovered and became the subject of an episode of the American documentary series, *Unsolved Mysteries*. But shortly after the broadcast, the remainder of the hand was purportedly stolen from the Pangboche monastery. In 2008, another finger fragment was discovered and in 2011 was submitted for testing by the BBC. After decades of speculation it was discovered that the bones were in fact human ones. The final bizarre twist in this story took place the same year when mountaineer Mike Allsop presented the Pangboche monastery with a replica hand created by Weta Workshop – the team who created the special props for Peter Jackson's *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy.



The famous Pangboche Yeti scalp and hand, which were stolen from the monastery

The Silver Hut Expedition

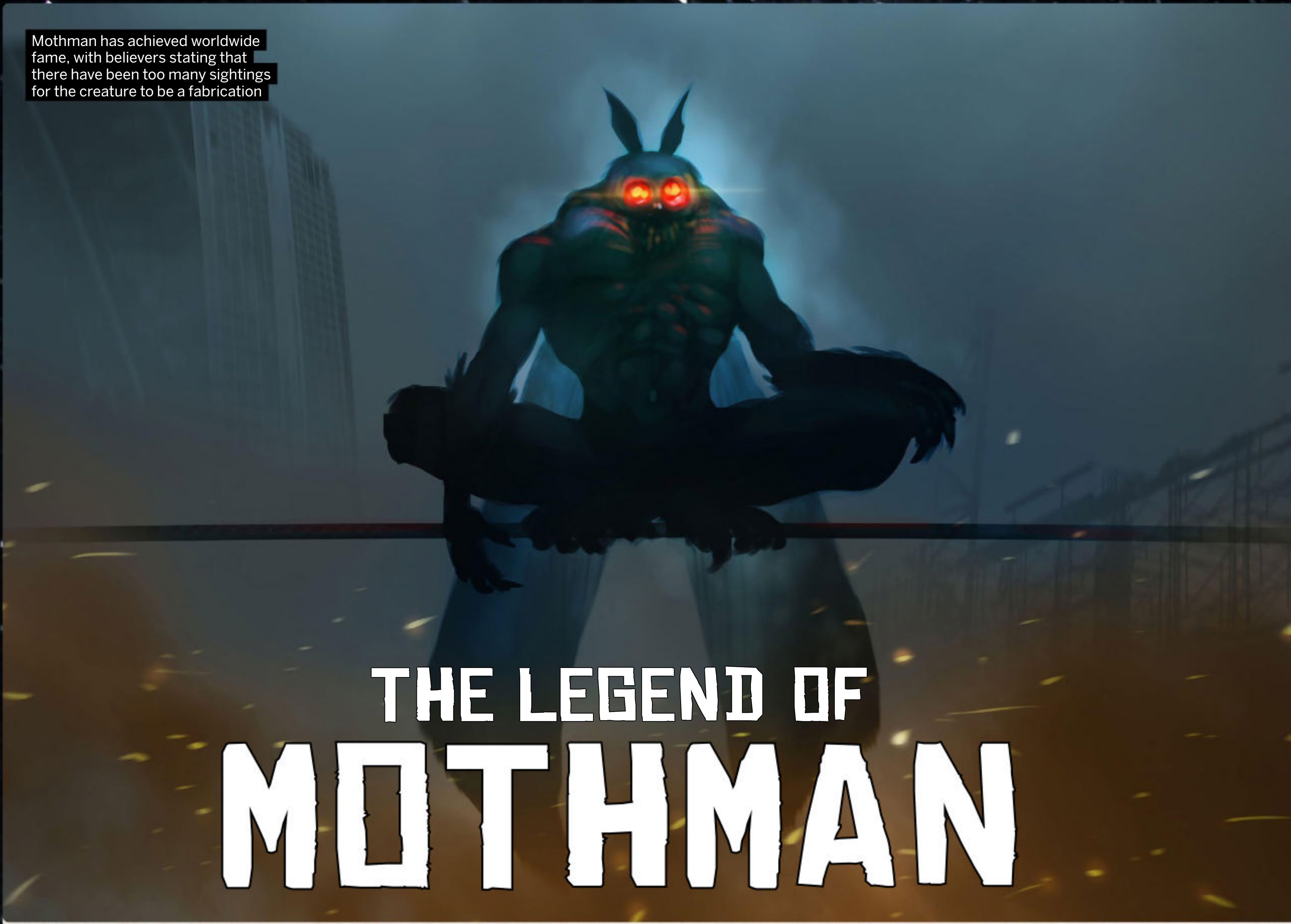
One of history's most famous mountaineers is Edmund Hillary who, along with Tenzing Norgay in 1953, became one of the first men to stand on the summit of Mount Everest. Eight years later, Hillary was leading the Silver Hut expedition to the Himalayas, this time to hunt for Yeti, even though he was sceptical. Nonetheless, Hillary still took precautions, including what he described as "a gun that shoots a hypodermic syringe". Although he returned with yet another purported Yeti scalp, the expedition failed to convince the famous mountaineer. At a press conference Hillary stated: "I have never believed in the existence of the snowman," and claimed they had "found rational explanations for most Yeti phenomena".

But what of the mysterious footprints that had sparked Yeti Mania? In a 1961 article in *LIFE* magazine, Hillary stated that contemporary discoveries meant "we know that a Yeti track can be made by the sun melting the footprints of a small creature such as a fox," going on to state that there's no reason why the same could not happen to humans. In 2019, The Indian Army tweeted images of footprints that some believed to be those of a Yeti. However, Daniel C Taylor (author of *Yeti: The Ecology Of A Mystery*) debunked these, noting that the only creatures known to have made footprints that large were dinosaurs. As it's unlikely that dinosaur-sized creatures were stomping around the Himalayas unnoticed, Taylor suggests they were made by the Himalayan black bear.

The Hunt Goes On?

Like Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster, stories of the Yeti fill us with wonder. The association of these creatures with threatening landscapes (deep lakes, vast forests and mountains) perhaps explains their perseverance as ideas. Throughout history, supernatural or preternatural explanations have been sought for human's anxieties about the world we live in. Perhaps then this is all the Yeti is? A fairy tale created and perpetuated to explain our fears and fascination with areas where it is difficult for humanity to tread. But of course, that's the sceptical explanation. The other answer is that, out there in the wilds of the Himalayas, a creature does exist.

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images, © Shutterstock



Mothman has achieved worldwide fame, with believers stating that there have been too many sightings for the creature to be a fabrication

THE LEGEND OF MOTHMAN

Not one for the faint-hearted, the legend of Mothman originated in West Virginia, United States, in the 1960s, and endures to this day

FIRST SIGHTED
1966

LOCATION
Point Pleasant, West Virginia

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Winged humanoid, that's 1.8-2.1m (6-7ft) tall, complete with glowing red eyes

MOTHMAN REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR OF US URBAN LEGENDS, STILL INSPIRING WORLDWIDE INTEREST TODAY

Around midnight on 15 November 1966, two couples from Point Pleasant, West Virginia – Steve and Mary Mallette and Roger and Linda Scarberry – had a terrifying encounter. Driving together in the Scarberry's car, both couples described witnessing a creature that defied explanation: 1.8-2.1 metres in height (six or seven feet), with a wingspan of three metres (ten feet) and glowing red eyes, it was, according to Mr Mallette, like a man with wings. According to the statements given, the creature displayed great speed, flying – they estimated it was around 161 kilometres per hour (100 miles per hour). However it was not so good at running, its movements described as clumsy. Mr Scarberry wasted no time in driving from the scene, only for the creature to follow, hovering after the car and scurrying through a nearby field as it continued to give chase. One weak point appeared to be that the creature was afraid of light: when the car lights shone on it, it tried to avoid them. The creature finally departed, rising straight upwards and disappearing with the sound of flapping wings.

The account of this experience was published the following day in the *Point Pleasant Register*, sparking a spate of similar sightings of the creature that was soon to be named Mothman. There was little doubt in the minds of many that they were witnessing

A sculpture commemorating the Mothman sightings of 1966/7 has been erected in Point Pleasant, where the legend continues to be prominent in local folklore

something supernatural, and talk of UFOs and monsters abounded. More rational explanations were soon forthcoming however: an associate professor of wildlife biology from West Virginia University, posited that the description matched that of the sandhill crane, the second largest crane in America.

In his 1975 book, *The Mothman Prophecies*, John Keel brought Mothman to a wider audience, linking the collapse of the Silver Bridge that led to the death of 46 people and injury of nine more, to Mothman. The 2002 film of the same name was based on the book.

Mothman remains one of the most popular of US urban legends, still inspiring worldwide interest today. As often happens, the original details have been greatly inflated, with wild claims being made about the creature, such as Mothman is an alien, a harbinger of doom, or an as yet undiscovered type of animal. A less outlandish explanation, that the red eyes were actually the reflection of torch or headlights on the eyes of barn owls, has done little to dampen enthusiasm for the legend.

Point Pleasant has fully embraced the legend, with the Annual Mothman Festival held every third weekend of September since 2002.

Are the glowing eyes an indicator of a cryptid, or just the reflection of a barn owl's peepers?

Images © Getty Images, Alamy

FIRST SIGHTED
1976

LOCATION
Mawnan, Cornwall, UK

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
The Cornish Owlman is said to be a man-sized owl, or 'feathered bird-man', possibly with glowing eyes, pointed ears and menacing pincers

THE CORNISH OWLMAN

The tiny village of Mawnan Smith near Falmouth in Cornwall became the focal point for some particularly frightening feathered sightings

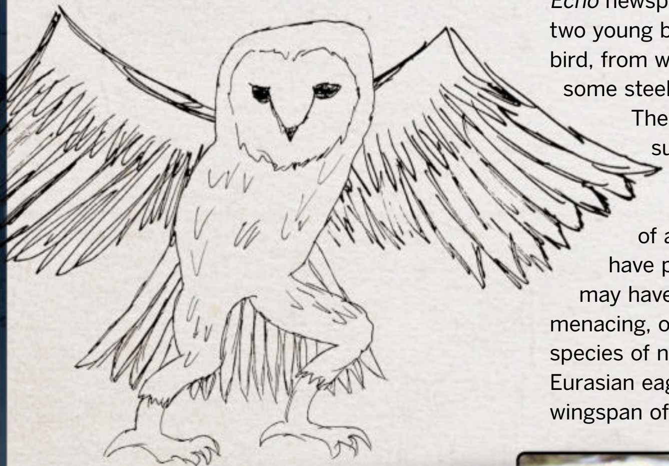
Reports of an Owlman sighting were conveyed by local writer, magician and eccentric, Tony 'Doc' Shiels, who in 1976, claimed to have investigated an incident where two girls witnessed the creature when on holiday in Mawnan. Identified as June and Vicky Melling, the girls were walking through the churchyard of St Mawnan and St Stephen's Church when they looked up to see an enormous feathered being, the size of a grown man. Terrified, the children ran back to their family, and eventually presented Shiels with a drawing of the creature, which was widely circulated in the local press.

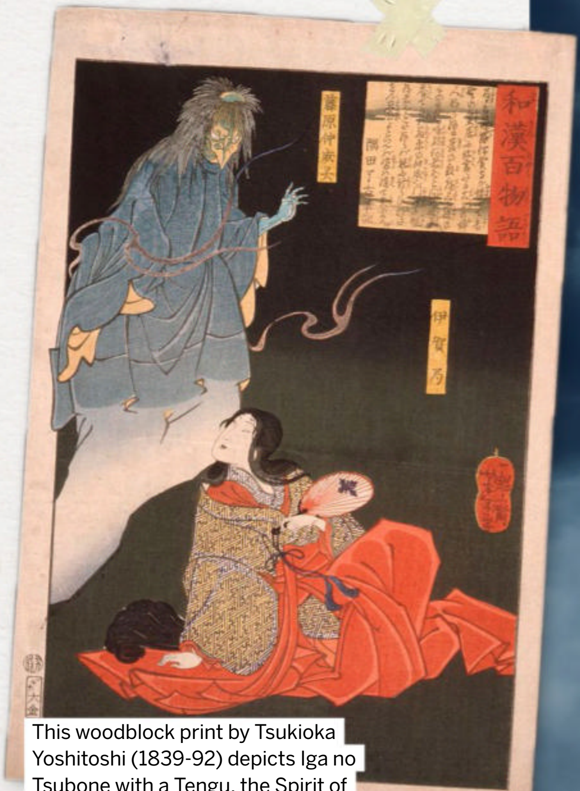
A few months later, the Owlman was seen again, once more by two young girls, who were aware of the Owlman story, and claimed to have witnessed the same beast, which flew into the air and disappeared, leaving a hissing sound of static in its wake. These reports painted a more elaborate owl-creature, with pointed ears, glowing eyes and enormous, black pincers, like those used by a blacksmith.

Despite the relative obscurity of the Owlman story, there have been occasional sightings of the Owlman close to the churchyard, with reports of strange lights and unnatural owl-like hooting heard well into the new millennium.

However, the Mawnan Owlman may be older than we think. Some folklorists link a far earlier cryptid bird report from 1926 with the Owlman sightings of the 1970s. In 1926, The *Cornish Echo* newspaper reported an incident whereby two young boys were chased by an enormous bird, from which they sought refuge behind some steel grating.

The Owlman has little evidence to support its existence and is widely believed to be either a deliberate hoax or the misidentification of an existing owl species. Many have proposed that a trick of the light may have made a barn owl appear more menacing, or that the creature was indeed a species of non-native large owl, such as an Eurasian eagle-owl, which can often possess a wingspan of over 1.8 metres (six foot).





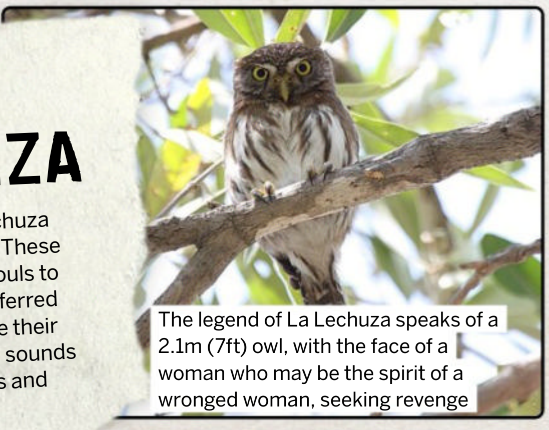
This woodblock print by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839-92) depicts Iga no Tsubone with a Tengu, the Spirit of Fujiwara no Nakanari

JAPAN'S TENGU

Many cultures feature bird-human hybrids in their mythology. Japan's rich folkloric history features many different avian beasts with human characteristics, including the terrifying Tengu; huge bird-like creatures in possession of supernatural powers and ancient wisdom. Regarded as magical guardians of mountains and forests, some Tengus wear traditional monk's robes and hold a powerful fan that can create great winds.

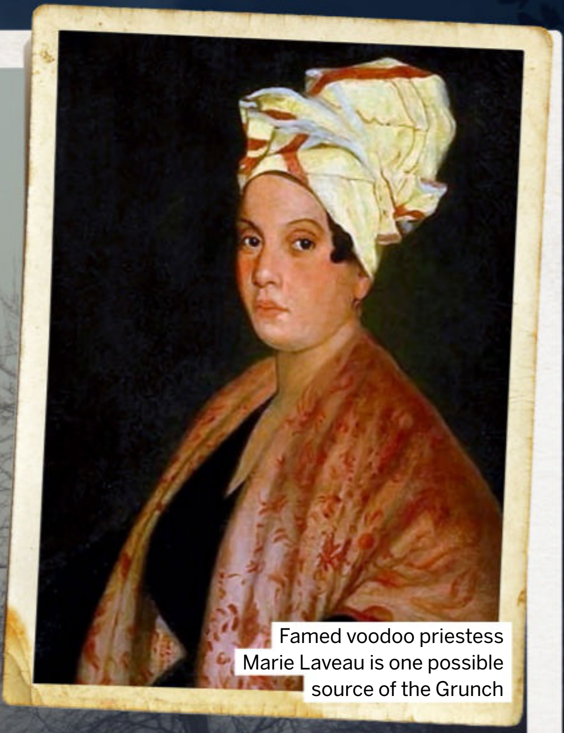
THE SHAPE-SHIFTING LECHUZA

Much like the harpies of Greek mythology, the Lechuza of Mexico are large birds with the face of a woman. These hybrids are believed to be women who sold their souls to the devil in exchange for magical powers. Often referred to as shapeshifting spirits or witches, Lechuza lure their victims towards them by whistling or mimicking the sounds of a crying baby, after which the Lechuza attacks and carries off the unfortunate individual.



The legend of La Lechuza speaks of a 2.1m (7ft) owl, with the face of a woman who may be the spirit of a wronged woman, seeking revenge

Images © Getty Images, Alamy, Wiki Commons



Famed voodoo priestess Marie Laveau is one possible source of the Grunch

FIRST SIGHTED
1800s

LOCATION
East New Orleans, Louisiana

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Large goat-like, demonic humanoid or a canine-reptilian hybrid

THE GRUNCH

Despite having a smattering of origin stories, there is one consistent when it comes to this crytpid – avoid at all costs

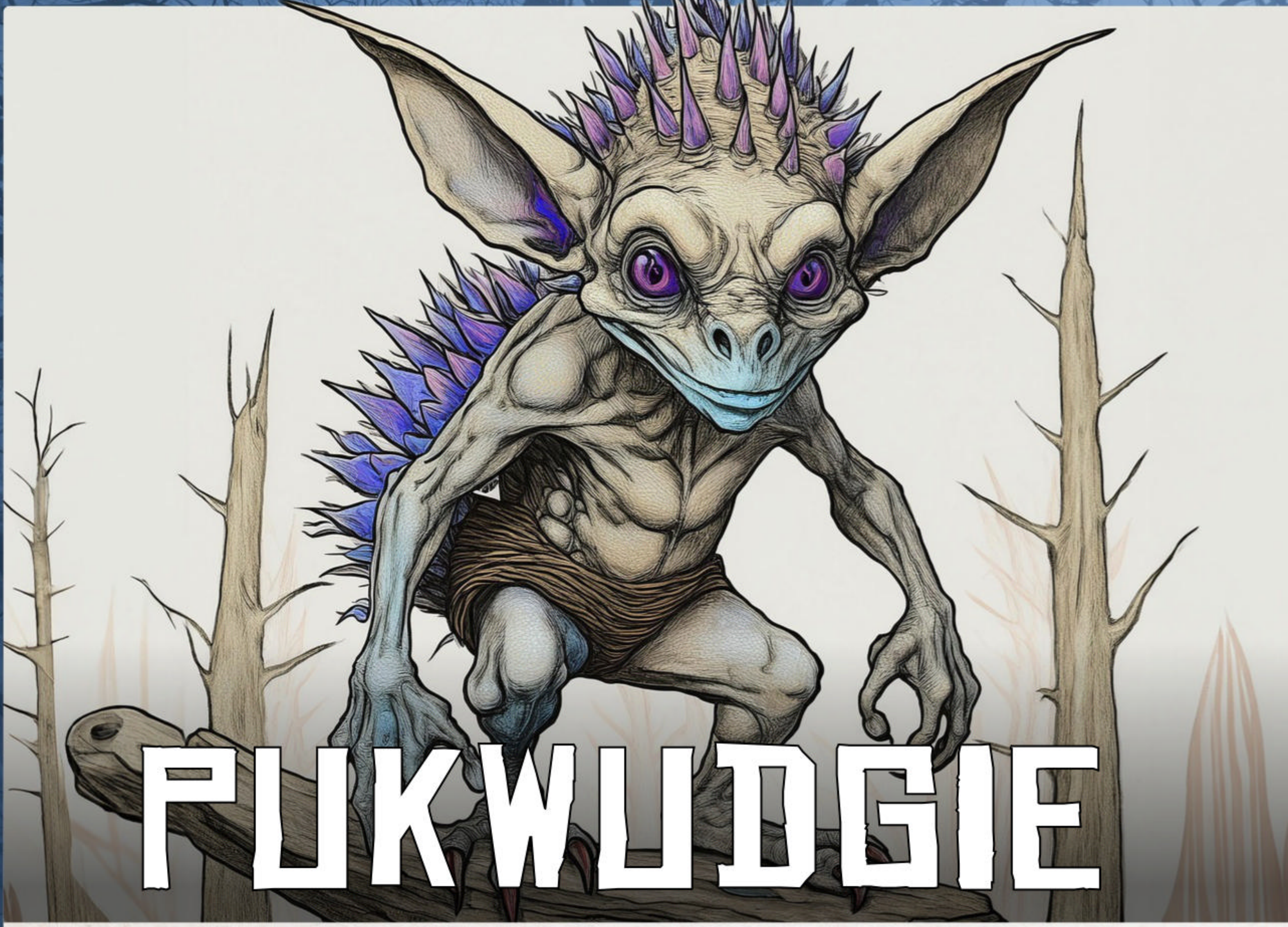
There are many conflicting descriptions of the Grunch – perhaps more so than for any other cryptid. Some say it's a monstrous Pan-like being, part-man, part-goat who possesses a wolf-like howl or banshee-esque scream, and occasionally sports devilish bat wings and a tail. Others seem to mistake it for a Chupacabra (page 91) – describing it as a reptilian wolf of sorts with sharp spines or quills along its back and leathery black skin. More still suggest that the Grunch are an entire race of inbred albino dwarves, who were driven to the swamps and devolved into terrifying feral cannibals that sound more like Pukwudgies (see next page). There is even a rumour that the Grunch is the result of famous New Orleans voodoo priestess Marie Laveau's rendezvous with the devil – an origin story that is strikingly similar to that of the Jersey Devil (page 66). When Laveau attempted to castrate her offspring, its organs multiplied, creating a male and a female Grunch who attacked her before escaping into the Bayou.

However, no matter its origin, there's no doubt of one thing – the Grunch is not a creature you'd like to bump into. They possess a human-like intelligence and cunning, with the ability to mimic human voices and utilise human tools. They are vicious demons, lurking around remote roads where they leave injured animals to lure victims out of their cars and drain their blood.

Earliest reports of this goat-headed beast began not long after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, with it taking the blame for a series of livestock mutilations. During the Civil War, a group of Confederate soldiers encountered a 'horned demon' along the banks of the Mississippi, who became known as the Chalmette Devil. The men drove him off with gun fire but not before two of their party were savagely torn to shreds. In 1909, a New Orleans streetcar driver encountered what he described as a "huge, hairy beast", but managed to speed off and escape the Grunch's clutches. During the 1970s, the Algiers neighbourhood was plagued by a string of pet disappearances for which the Grunch was accused. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, sightings increased once more – the storm was said to have forced the Grunch from their rural habitat and into nearby New Orleans neighbourhoods, resulting in a flurry of sightings.

The jury's out on whether this creature is a name brandished upon a number of rabid animals, a mistaken Chupacabra, a race of goblins or a baphomet-esque pagan god, but one thing's for sure: the people of Louisiana don't dare leave their pets out in the yard.

THEY POSSESS A HUMAN-LIKE INTELLIGENCE AND CUNNING, WITH THE ABILITY TO MIMIC HUMAN VOICES AND UTILISE HUMAN TOOLS



PUKWUDGIE

This mini-cryptid of North American folklore might not be the tallest, but he can make a good friend, or a nasty foe

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Northeastern United States, Southeastern Canada and the Great Lakes

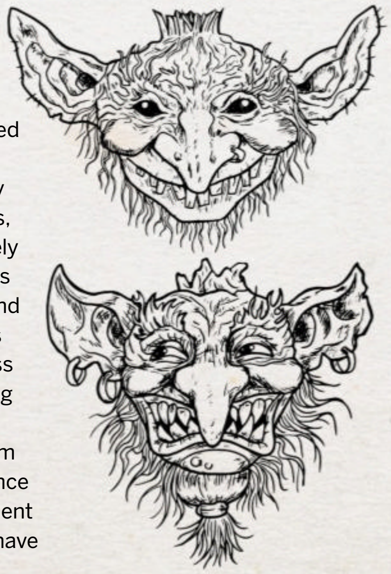
LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Pure fiction

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Short humanoid that looks like a troll or gnome, with porcupine quills over their back

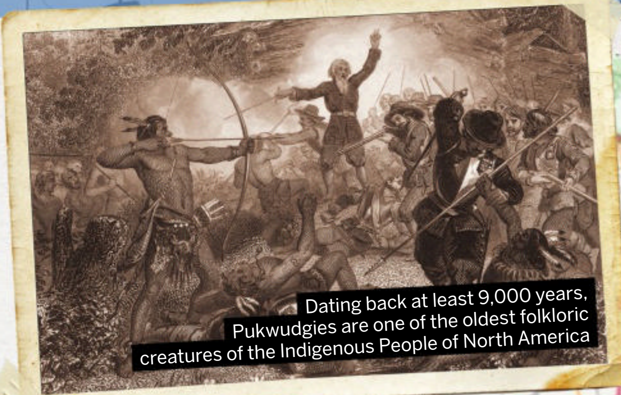
Dating back thousands of years through the folklore of the Indigenous People of America and Canada, Pukwudgies are one of the oldest mythical creatures in North America. Called by many names in the lore, they are best known by the name 'Pukwudgie', which translates as person of the wilderness. Standing no more than 0.9 metres (three feet), from the front, these small creatures have a troll-like appearance, but from behind they can be mistaken for porcupines due to the quills that cover them. They often carry spears or bows, from which they shoot poisoned arrows.

The origins of the Pukwudgie can be found in the creation stories of the Wampanoag people, and they are described in many traditional stories as little forest dwellers with a taste for mischief and worse. These small creatures are similar to the faeries or gnomes of European folklore and their nature changes depending on which tribal story they are being described by. To some they are friendly pranksters, to others benign creatures who only turn nasty when they are provoked. In yet other tellings, the Pukwudgie is a character who is definitely not to be trifled with, playing naughty pranks at best and committing acts of abduction and violence at worst, even stealing away babies when human backs are turned. They possess some powers of mind control too, compelling people to follow them to the edge of cliffs, from which the Pukwudgies either push them to their deaths or use their powers to convince them to jump. Whether harmless or malevolent though, one thing is common: Pukwudgies have a taste for mischief.

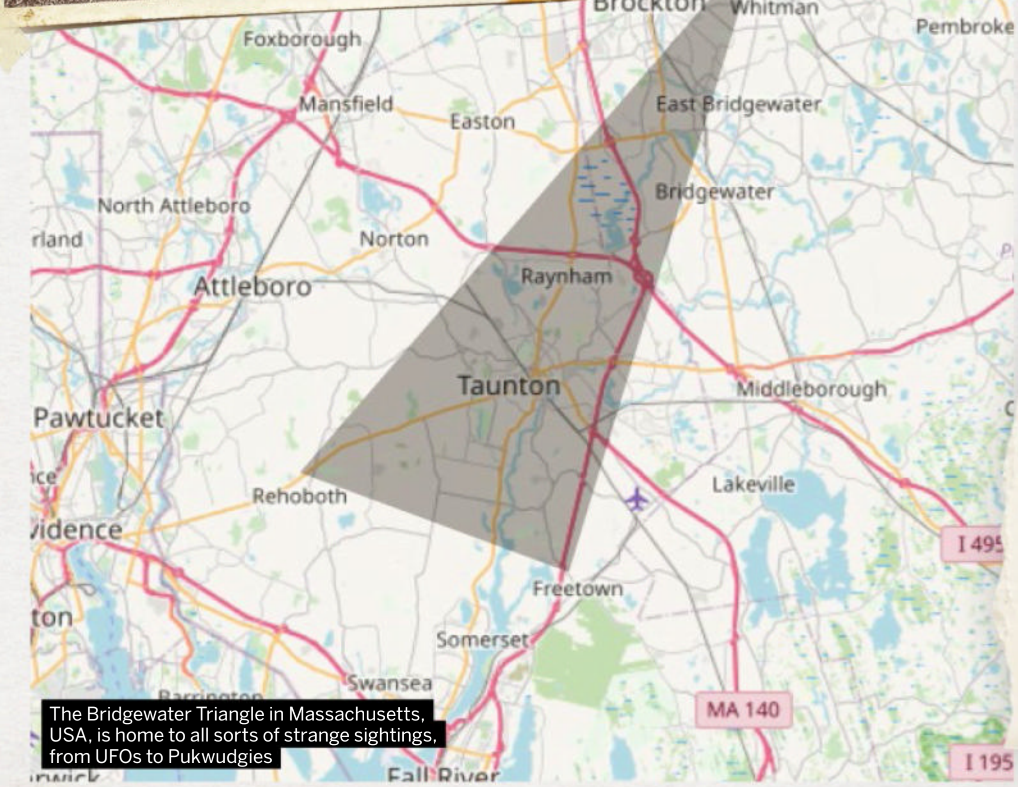
The little Pukwudgies are found deep in the wilderness, considered by many to be ancient forest spirits. In some stories, they can be identified by their sweet floral scent, a world



Depending on which version of the stories you prefer, Pukwudgies are either harmless pranksters of nasty little baby stealers



Dating back at least 9,000 years, Pukwudgies are one of the oldest folkloric creatures of the Indigenous People of North America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Weymouth
Braintree
Randolph
Norwell
Rockland
Hanover
Abington
Brockton
Whitman
Pembroke
Foxborough
Mansfield
Easton
East Bridgewater
North Attleboro
Norton
Bridgewater
Attleboro
Raynham
Taunton
Middleborough
Pawtucket
Rehoboth
Lakeville
I 495
Freetown
Somerset
Swansea
MA 140
I 195
Fall River

The Bridgewater Triangle in Massachusetts, USA, is home to all sorts of strange sightings, from UFOs to Pukwudgies

GREMLINS

The Gremlin is a mythical creature of the 20th century, initially used to explain malfunctions in aircraft. The first written record of Gremlins can be found in 1929 and it was widely used by members of the RAF to describe problems with their planes. Author Roald Dahl was inspired by his RAF service to write his first novel for children, *The Gremlins*, in which the creatures sabotage RAF fighters in revenge for the destruction of their forest home. The concept caught the public imagination and before long, Gremlins had escaped into the popular consciousness, never to leave.

Cute.
Clever.
Mischievous.
Intelligent.
Dangerous.
STEVEN SPIELBERG
GREMLINS

From their RAF origins, Gremlins have become a beloved staple in pop culture, thanks to their starring role in two Hollywood films

away from the foul stench of death that follows the fearsome Wendigo. The Pukwudgie possess various magical abilities, which they can use to become invisible, confuse the humans they encounter or even alter their appearance to look like other animals.

According to traditional Wampanoag stories, Pukwudgies attempted to live alongside the humans. However, the Pukwudgies eventually grew tired of the lack of appreciation they received when they tried to help the people they encountered and so turned against them. They started playing tricks on the humans, who then complained to Maushop, the mythical giant hero of Wampanoag mythology. In retaliation, Maushop threw the Pukwudgies away from the humans and they landed in the Great Lakes. Grievously offended at the treatment they received, the Pukwudgies now devote themselves to making the lives of humans miserable.

Sadly, there are no confirmed Pukwudgie sightings and no photographic evidence for these creatures that have been immortalised through oral tradition over millennia. However, there have been dozens of reported sightings in more modern times, with many people experiencing encounters with the creatures in rural Indiana and Massachusetts. In several of these reports, people claim that the Pukwudgie had stared at them or even tried to lure them into the woods, with one or two apparently following people home. In some cases, people were tempted towards deep woods by bright orbs of light, similar to the Will-o'-the-wisp of European folktales. Once they strayed from the path, they glimpsed the small figure of the Pukwudgie, apparently the source of the light. Legends of Pukwudgies pushing people to their deaths from cliffs take on a sinister modern twist atop a cliff in Freetown State Forest, Massachusetts, from which many people have jumped to their deaths. Still others have reported an unexplained temptation to jump, which they have attributed to the magical influence of the hidden Pukwudgies.

Although some modern encounters with Pukwudgies have left people terrified or with a deep feeling of dread and menace, others have chosen to view the creature in a humorous light. Sightings of Pukwudgies and fears of their poisoned arrows became so common in Freetown State Forest, that officials eventually erected a tongue-in-cheek sign alerting motorists to the possibility of Pukwudgies Crossing. You have been warned!

> PUKWUDGIES GREW TIRED OF THE LACK OF APPRECIATION THEY RECEIVED WHEN THEY TRIED TO HELP PEOPLE AND SO TURNED AGAINST THEM

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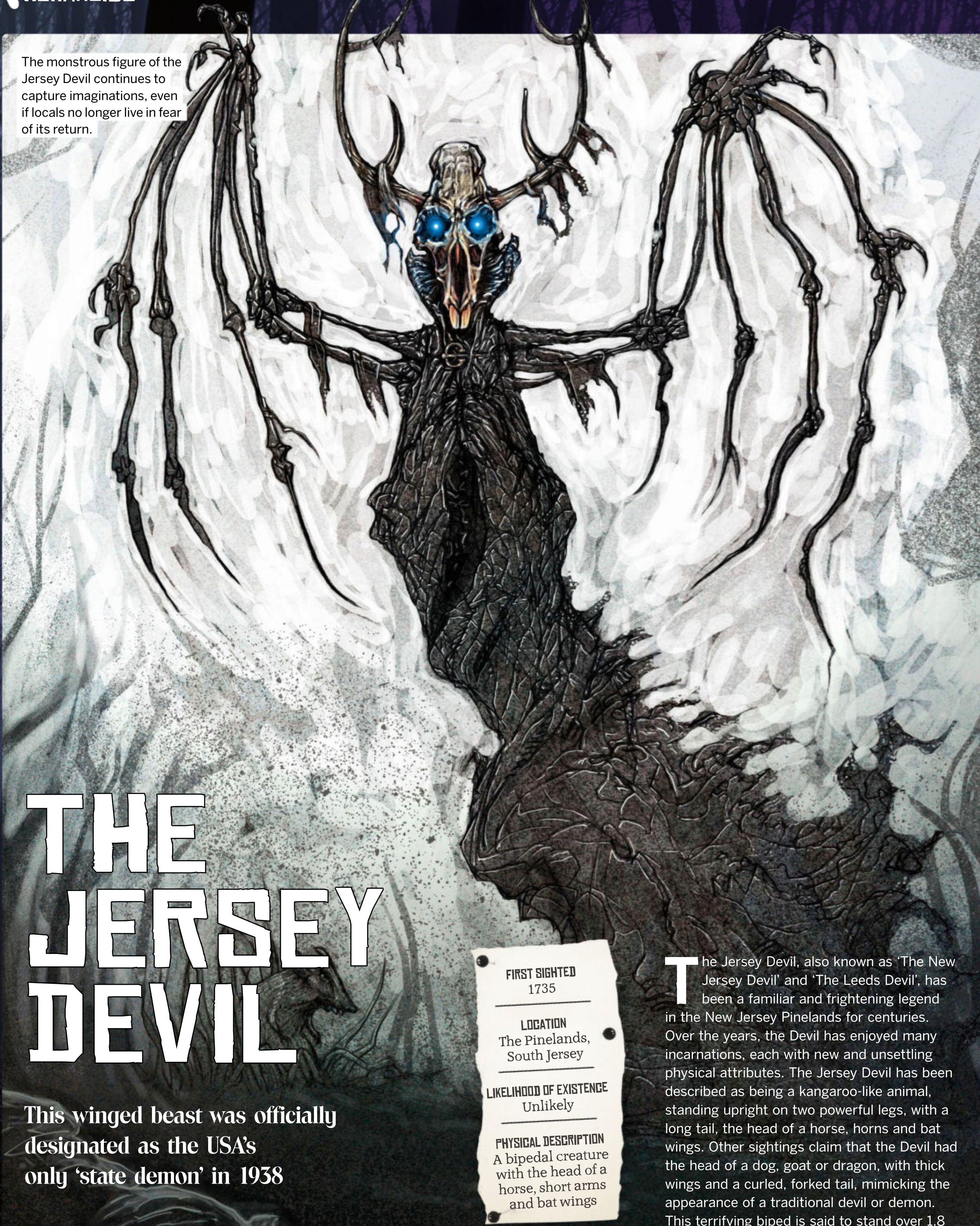


The monstrous figure of the Jersey Devil continues to capture imaginations, even if locals no longer live in fear of its return.

THE JERSEY DEVIL

This winged beast was officially designated as the USA's only 'state demon' in 1938

FIRST SIGHTED
1735

LOCATION
The Pinelands, South Jersey

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
A bipedal creature with the head of a horse, short arms and bat wings

The Jersey Devil, also known as 'The New Jersey Devil' and 'The Leeds Devil', has been a familiar and frightening legend in the New Jersey Pinelands for centuries. Over the years, the Devil has enjoyed many incarnations, each with new and unsettling physical attributes. The Jersey Devil has been described as being a kangaroo-like animal, standing upright on two powerful legs, with a long tail, the head of a horse, horns and bat wings. Other sightings claim that the Devil had the head of a dog, goat or dragon, with thick wings and a curled, forked tail, mimicking the appearance of a traditional devil or demon. This terrifying biped is said to stand over 1.8

metres (six feet), move impossibly fast on clawed or hooved feet, and produce a 'blood-curdling scream' that has struck fear into the inhabitants of South Jersey for over 240 years.

The Jersey Devil is said to inhabit the dense Pinelands that stretch across several counties. These ancient forests are believed to provide cover for the predatory beast, who is said to rarely leave the woodland, only emerging to rampage through nearby settlements.

First recorded in 1735, the Jersey Devil was not discovered in a forest, but birthed in a human home. According to legend, a local Eastville woman known as Mother Leeds discovered she was expecting her 13th child. Exhausted and frustrated at the news, she exclaimed "Let this one be the devil!". Nine months later, Mother Leeds went into labour as a storm raged over her house, with thunder and lightning that tore up the night sky. Eventually, she gave birth to a normal, healthy baby boy, but this relief was not to last. The child immediately began to transform, sprouting horns, claws and enormous wings that carried it up the chimney, following a brutal attack on the household. The midwives who fortunately survived the child's attack, reported the transformation and escape to their community, and the tale of the Jersey Devil had begun.

The New Jersey Pinelands cover 1.1 million acres of the state's land

Many historians believe the origins of the Jersey Devil to be found in the colonial-era communities of New Jersey, namely the prominent Leeds family, who produced prodigious numbers of children. These deeply religious settlers often encountered ferocious religious and social disputes that became entrenched in the folklore and spiritual fears of the time.

THERE HAVE BEEN HUNDREDS OF SIGHTINGS OF THE CREATURE, ACROSS MANY TOWNS

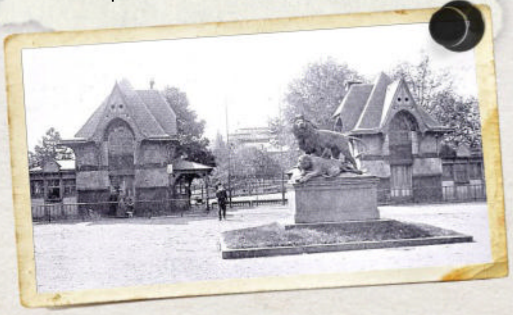
There have been many accounts of the Jersey Devil causing chaos throughout the centuries. In most instances, it is seen fleeing farms and chicken coops, after destroying crops and livestock, and is sometimes seen flying across the sky, returning to the safety of the Pinelands. There have been hundreds of sightings of the creature, across many towns, and from famous names, such as Napoleon Bonaparte's brother Joseph, who reported an encounter in 1820. Unsurprisingly, mobs of angry villagers have gathered across the years, seeking out a means to rid their communities of the Devil once and for all. At one point, a reward of $10,000 was offered to anyone who could capture it, but to no avail.

The Jersey Devil's most infamous reign of terror occurred in 1909, where a spate of attacks were reported across the Delaware Valley. The creature was seen by several eyewitnesses across several townships and was even linked to the attack of a social club and trolley car. Newspapers whipped up such levels of hysteria that schools and businesses closed.

Like many large, unusual cryptids, the likelihood of the Jersey Devil's existence is low. Attacks on livestock are usually revealed to be the work of wolves, bears or simply wild dogs. The Jersey Devil may have become a cultural icon of the Pinelands, but in all likelihood, has been the product of imagination and hysteria.

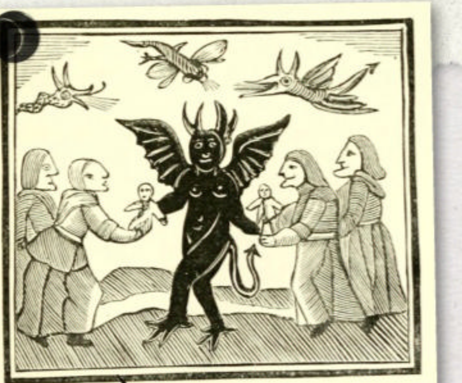
A DEVILISH REWARD

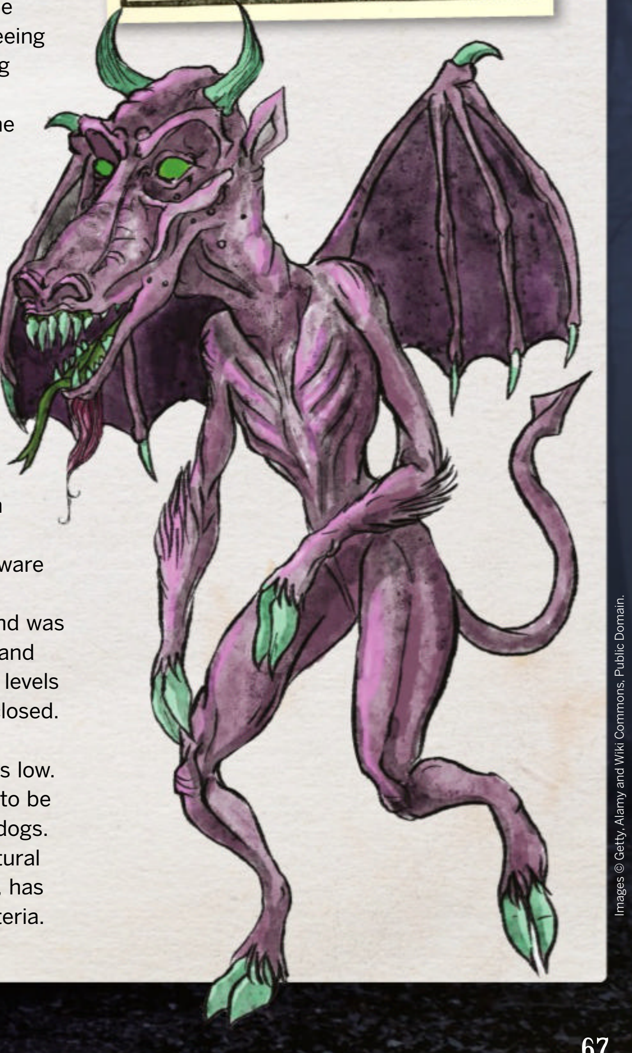
During a wave of sightings, it is reported that Philadelphia Zoo offered a reward of $10,000 for anyone who could capture the Jersey Devil alive. The handsome reward attracted monster-hunters and local hoaxers alike, two of whom attempted to claim the cash by presenting the zoo with a kangaroo, complete with talons and fake bat wings.



A SATANIC INFLUENCE?

The Jersey Devil bears a striking likeness to other mythological creatures, such as satyrs, fauns and Pan (God of the wild), half-man-half-goat hybrids that exist across international folklore. The Jersey Devil's appearance is often thought to reflect the demonic fears of early Christian settlers, which could explain its unusual appearance. Its possession of horns and cloven hooves align the creature with Baphomet and Christian depictions of devils, where Satan is often shown in the form of a goat; a symbol of destruction.





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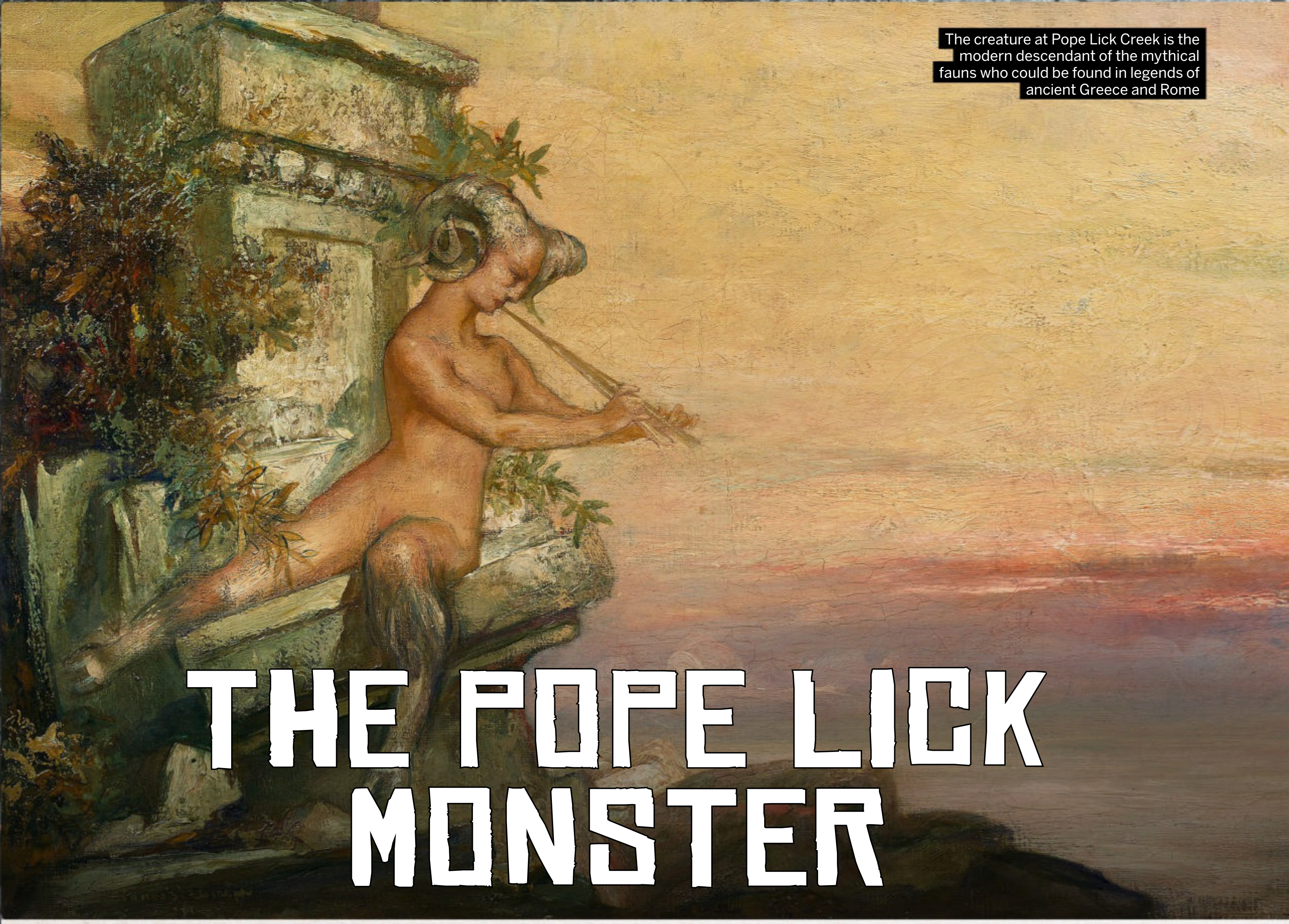


The creature at Pope Lick Creek is the modern descendant of the mythical fauns who could be found in legends of ancient Greece and Rome

THE POPE LICK MONSTER

In a secluded corner of Kentucky, sightseers have risked their lives in the hope of glimpsing a sinister goat-like figure

FIRST SIGHTED
1940s

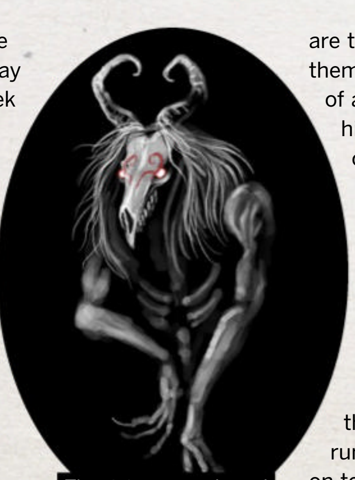
LOCATION
USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Pure fiction

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Axe-wielding goat-man-sheep hybrid; bipedal; hypnotic stare

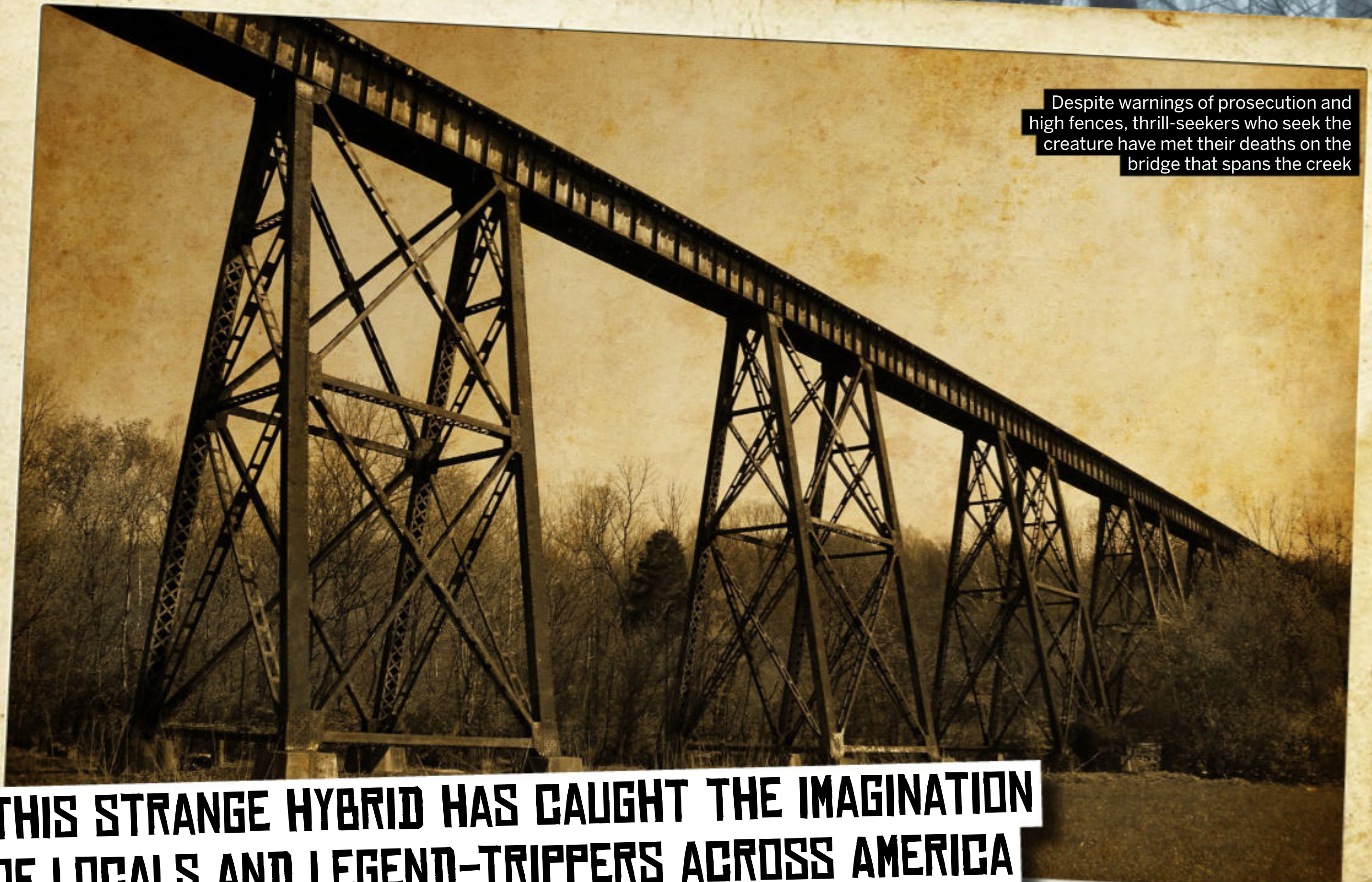
According to local legend in Kentucky, the Pope Lick Monster lives beneath a railway trestle bridge that spans Pope Lick Creek in the Louisville neighbourhood of Fisherville. Though initial sightings were reported in the 1940s and 1950s, tales of the creature – part-goat, part-sheep and part-man – were more widely popularised by a short film that was released in 1988 and since then, thrill-seekers have flocked to the busy bridge in the hope of having an encounter with the beast.

According to legend, the Pope Lick Monster stands at 2.1 metres (seven feet) tall and walks on two legs, his goat-like head topped by two monstrous horns. With his glowing red gaze, he hypnotises those who venture into his lair and tempts them to walk out onto the bridge. Two dozen freight trains use the track every single day and, if stories are to be believed, the creature lives to tempt them to their deaths either beneath the wheels of an oncoming train, or by a fall from the high trestle bridge. In order to gain control of them, he mimics the voice of friends and loved ones, convincing his victims that someone they know is calling out to them. However, he isn't satisfied with mere subterfuge. The Pope Lick Monster supposedly carries an enormous axe to decapitate his intended victims if they resist his efforts at hypnosis. Even innocent passersby on the road beneath the bridge aren't safe, as the creature is rumoured to leap off the bridge and land on top of cars as they pass beneath. Then he swiftly dispatches the unwary travellers with that fearsome axe.



The sinister man/goat/sheep hybrid has haunted the remote Pope Lick Creek trestle bridge for decades, fascinating and terrifying those who seek him

The Pope Lick Monster has strong similarities with other reports of goatman



Despite warnings of prosecution and high fences, thrill-seekers who seek the creature have met their deaths on the bridge that spans the creek

THIS STRANGE HYBRID HAS CAUGHT THE IMAGINATION OF LOCALS AND LEGEND-TRIPPERS ACROSS AMERICA

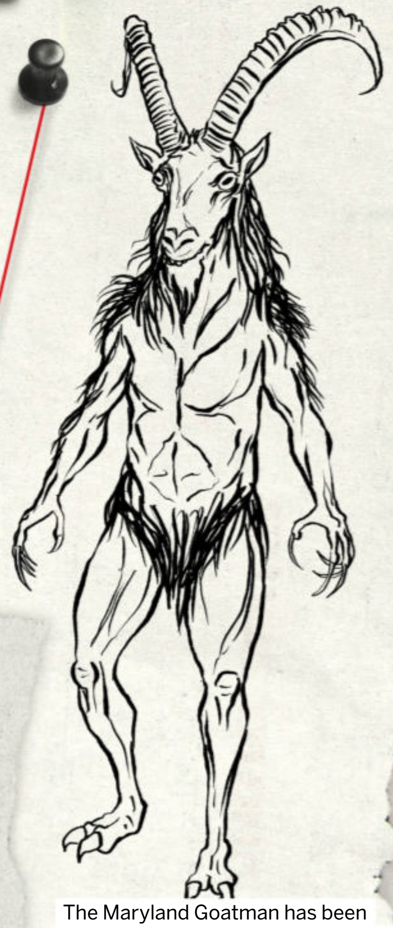
cryptids, who find their mythical ancestor in the faun of ancient Greek and Roman mythology. Whether or not the beast is real, it is indisputable that some people have indeed lost their lives in the search for the creature at Pope Lick Creek. In the decades since the story broke, thrill-seekers have visited the bridge and tragically, some have fallen from it. Non-locals have often wrongly believed that the bridge has fallen out of use but it is in fact a main route in Louisville. It's little wonder that some legend-hunters have found themselves stranded in the middle of the span, with nowhere to go when a train they hadn't expected thunders towards them. Today a high fence has been erected in an effort to block access, but determined legend-hunters have scaled it, with some paying the ultimate price. When Ron Schildknecht's 1988 film, *The Legend Of The Pope Lick Monster*, was released, railway officials were so worried about the potential interest it would cause that the film was screened with a disclaimer, warning that anyone who attempted to access the bridge would face criminal prosecution.

Though the creature has starred in a film and stage play, there is no evidence for his existence beyond local legend. According to Louisville stories, the beast is anything from a hybrid to a freakshow exhibit who has escaped when the freakshow train derailed on the bridge and now seeks vengeance on the society that mistreated him. Even more fantastical is the claim that the Pope Lick Monster is the twisted spirit of someone who sacrificed goats to Satan.

Whatever the truth behind the Pope Lick Monster, there's no doubt that something about this strange hybrid has caught the imagination not just of locals, but of legend-trippers across America. For more than 80 years he has gone unphotographed and unproven, but that hasn't stopped the steady stream of investigators who come to Kentucky in the hope of spotting the legendary creature. With the most recent documented casualty on Pope Lick Creek bridge having occurred as recently as 2019, it's likely that more lives will be lost in search of the legend.

THE GOATMAN

The Maryland Goatman is a hybrid creature who has variously been reported at several locations in the state. Initially reported in the 1970s, Goatman has been blamed for attacks on domestic animals and even canoodling teens down lovers' lane. Though stories of Goatman's adventures have featured in academic papers and are favourites of local teens, no evidence of his existence has been found.



The Maryland Goatman has been held responsible for attacks on family dogs and courting couples alike

Images © Getty Images, Alamy

THE WENDIGO

Emerging from Native American myth, the Wendigo has captured the imagination of modern America and even found its way into psychiatric diagnosis…

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Various, North America

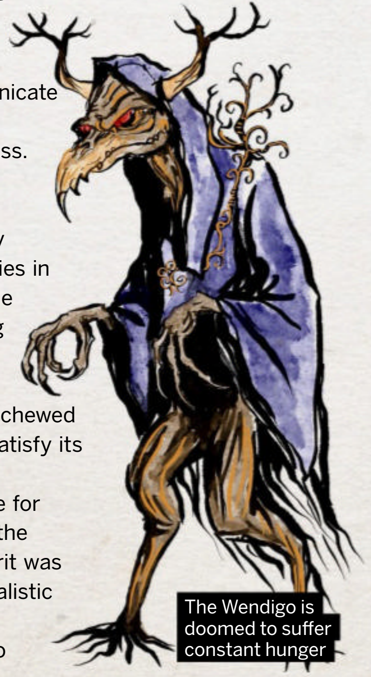
LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Pure fiction

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
An emaciated biped; prominent bones; grey skin and chewed lips; emits a foul stench

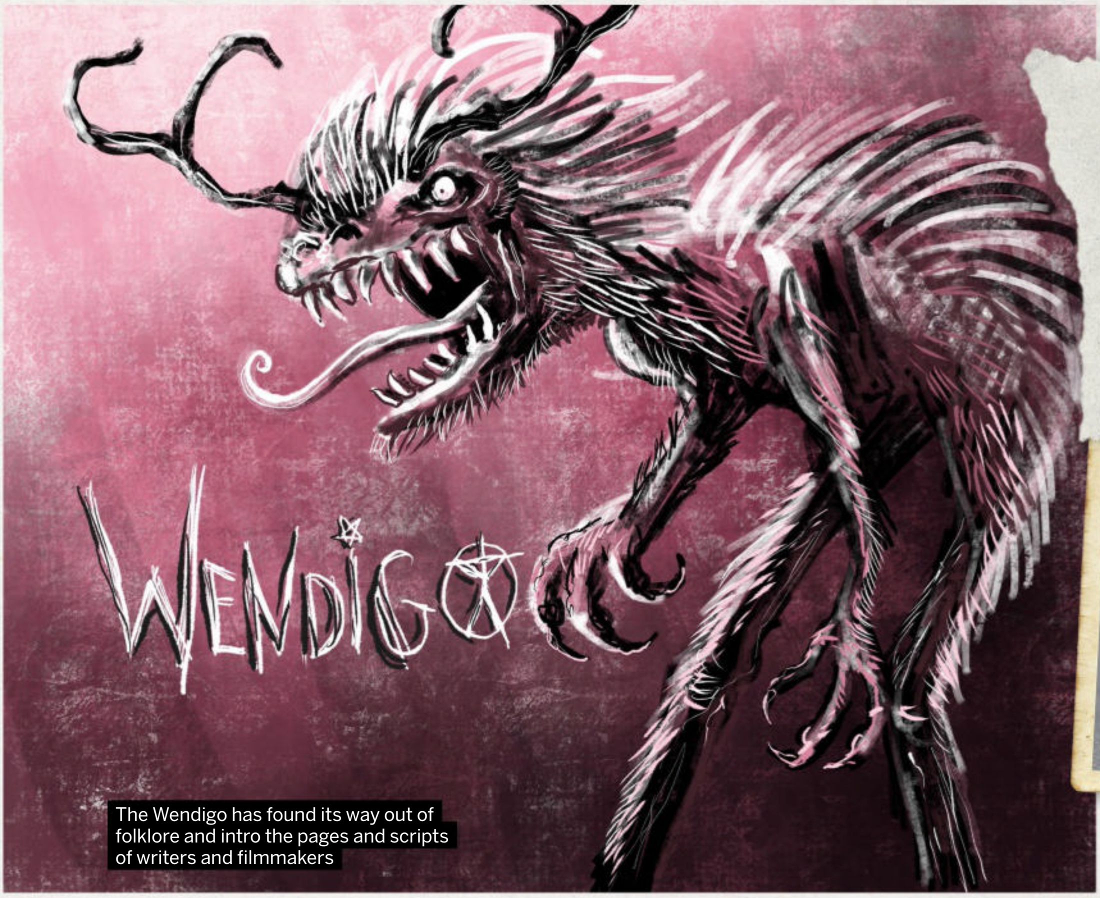
The Wendigo is a spirit that hails from the mythology of Algonquin-speaking peoples, who tell of a foul-smelling, emaciated creature with a ravenous hunger for human flesh. With every meal, the Wendigo absorbs the strength of the person it has killed, making it ever-more powerful and threatening. Though the origin of the Wendigo myth goes back into history, it was first set down in writing in 1636 by Paul LeJeune, a missionary living in what is now Quebec. LeJeune wrote of a fear that the Wendigo was eating members of the First Nations tribe with whom he was living.

As the embodiment of gluttony and excess, the Wendigo is never full, no matter how much it eats. It look emaciated, with its bones pushing through its papery, grey skin and its eyes sitting deep in hollow sockets. However, it grows with every meal, needing to consume more and more human flesh. It hunts constantly and is able to communicate with – and even possess – its victims, tormenting them to the point of madness. In some traditions, avaricious humans could actually turn into Wendigos, consumed by their own greed until they lose their humanity. Its appearance varies in each telling, from immense height to the addition of antlers or fangs and glowing eyes. Identifiable from afar because of its revolting stench, the Wendigo can also be identified from its tattered and chewed lips, which it has eaten in an effort to satisfy its immense craving for flesh.

The Wendigo proved a useful defence for cases of murder and cannibalism, and the claim of possession by a Wendigo's spirit was used – unsuccessfully – by one cannibalistic murderer in 1879, who had killed and consumed his family. In fact, it was also



The Wendigo is doomed to suffer constant hunger



The Wendigo has found its way out of folklore and intro the pages and scripts of writers and filmmakers

SKIN-WALKERS

The Navajo myth of the Skin-walker tells of a shape-shifting witch with the ability to assume animal form. These powerful witches are opposed to the values that the Navajo cherish, driven by a hunger for evil and chaos. Though many people have claimed terrifying encounters with Skin-walkers, the legend is one that is little discussed and widely misunderstood outside of Navajo culture.

Traditionally represented as a trickster, the coyote is one form that the Skin-walker is believed to be able to assume

> **DRIVEN BY A GREED THAT IS NEVER SATISFIED, THE WENDIGO CONSUMES EVERYTHING IT ENCOUNTERS**

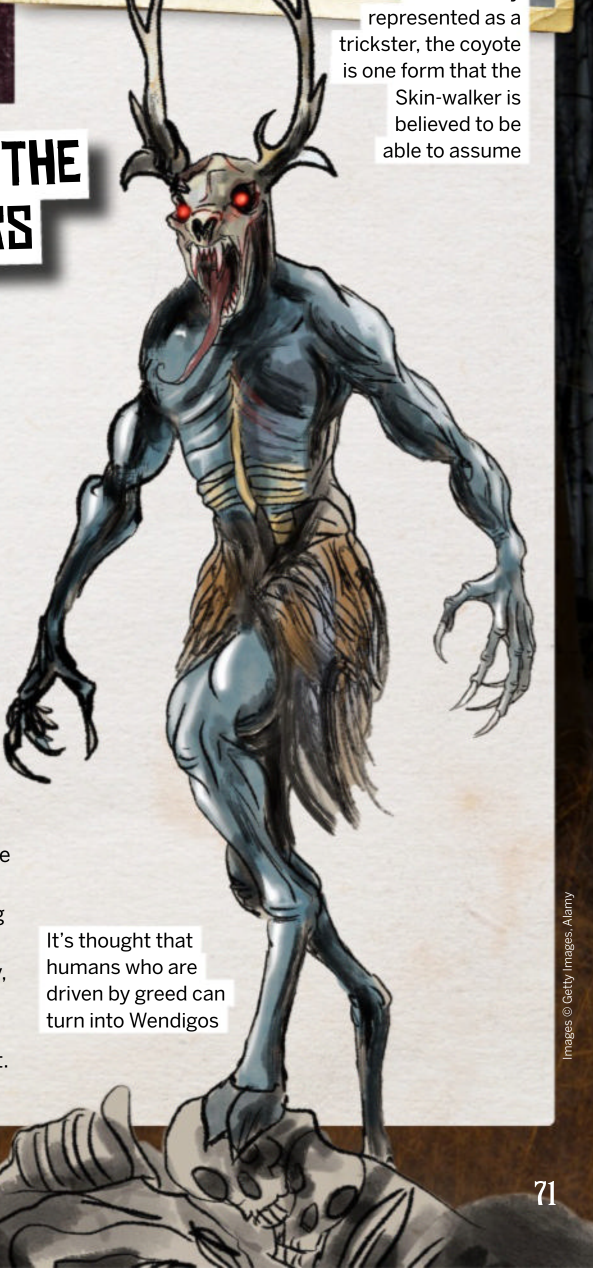
used as defence in another way, when two members of the Sandy Lake First Nation claimed that they had committed murder because they believed their victim had been possessed by a Wendigo. By the 20th century, the term 'Wendigo psychosis' had been used by psychologists to describe the delusion that one could be possessed by the Wendigo and driven to violent acts. However, the acceptance of this diagnosis remains a topic of intense debate.

Today, the Wendigo continues to fascinate. When hellish shrieks were heard in the Canadian wilderness in 2019, among the explanations that they might be the cries of bears or wolves were claims that the cries were those of a ravenous Wendigo. The internet is littered with stories from people who believe they have encountered the Wendigo in the modern age and lived to tell the tale, with everything from mysterious voices calling their name to the unexplained killing of cattle in the dead of night.

The Wendigo has served as a metaphor for a malign influence that can divide and destroy a community or for a group that seeks to dominate and subjugate another. Driven by a greed that is never satisfied, the Wendigo consumes everything that it encounters, just as cultures and identities can be similarly lost after domination by others.

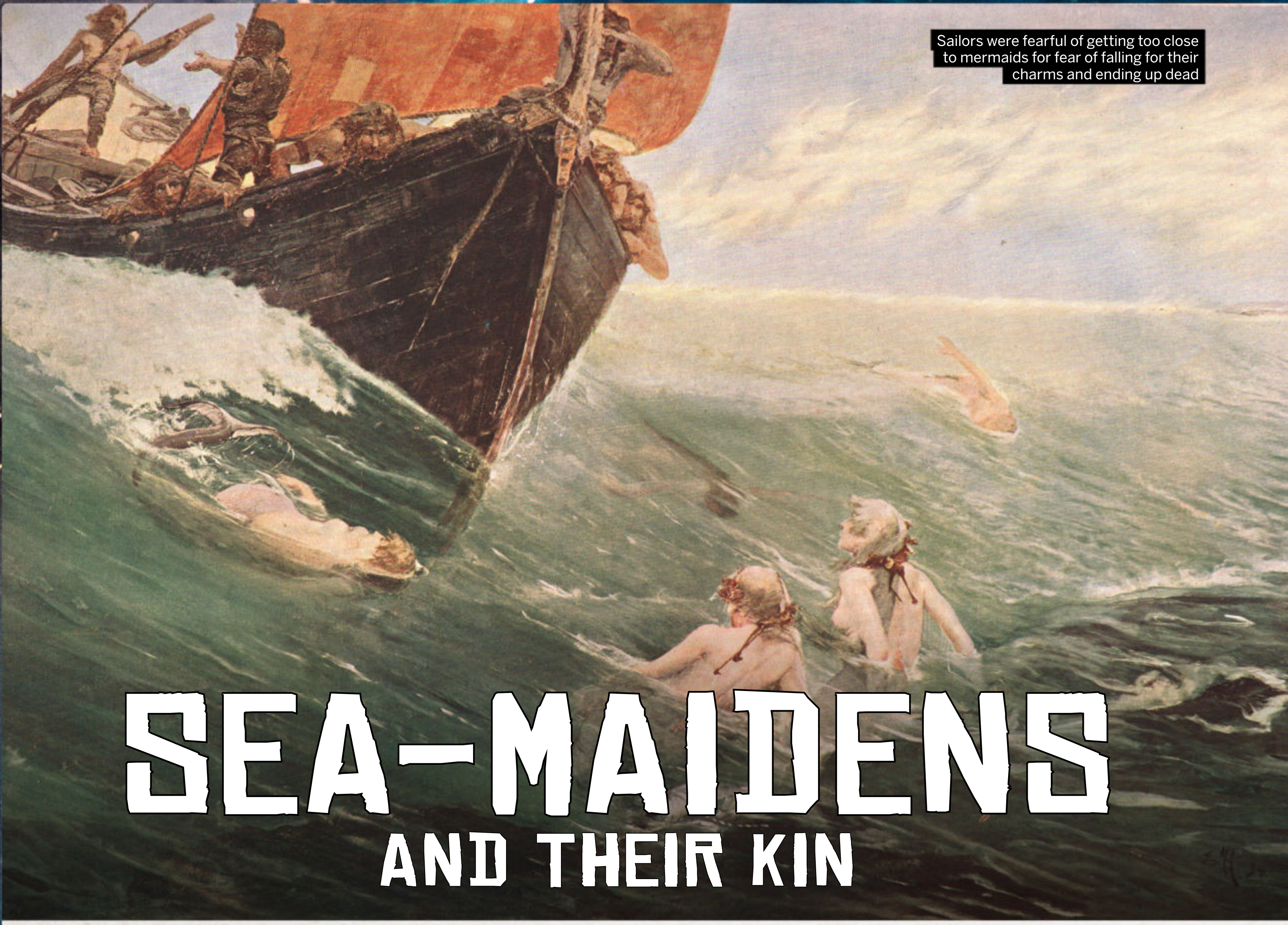
The malevolent spirit of myth has haunted the dreams of authors and filmmakers, too. From Algernon Blackwood's 1910 novella, *The Wendigo*, it has been a regular presence in horror, appearing in 1970s comic books and playing a memorable part in Stephen King's *Pet Semetary*, reanimating the animals laid to rest in the ancient burial ground of the title. Filmgoers aren't safe either, as the shadow of the Wendigo has stalked the screen in films as diverse as *The Lone Ranger* and 2021's *L'Inhumain*, in which a troubled surgeon turns his back on his First Nations heritage to pursue success. In *Antlers*, also released in 2021, a Wendigo spirit terrorises a small town, growing ever more hungry and ever more malevolent.

Few cryptids can claim a place in mythology, folklore, popular culture and psychiatry; it seems that the Wendigo will be feeding our hunger for the supernatural for a long time yet.



It's thought that humans who are driven by greed can turn into Wendigos

Images © Getty Images, Alamy



Sailors were fearful of getting too close to mermaids for fear of falling for their charms and ending up dead

SEA-MAIDENS

AND THEIR KIN

Sailors have claimed to have seen merfolk for centuries, frollicking in the waves, but do these fantastical human hybrids really exist?

FIRST SIGHTED
30,000 years ago

LOCATION
Worldwide

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Very unlikely

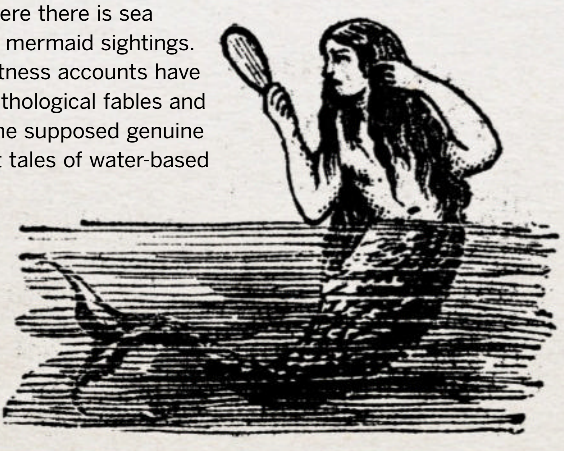
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Half-human, half-fish. Some are reported as being beautiful, while others are described as hideous creatures

The idea of merpeople living beneath the waves is a truly magical one and few children today would pass up the opportunity to meet one in person. But the notion of the benevolent mermaid is a relatively new one and if we look a little further into the past, it soon becomes apparent that the mermaid is rarely beautiful or kind. Rather, it is a creature to avoid at all costs.

The mermaid is a controversial creature within cryptozoological circles, since experts struggle to know what category of beast they are dealing with. Tales of sea-beings date back as far as human's first attempt to dominate the oceans, but are these fantastical tales or genuine sightings? It is thought that the first recorded incident with a mermaid dates back 30,000 years ago when tribesmen, during the late Palaeolithic period, painted female hybrid-creatures swimming in water on their cave walls. Such images ran alongside other hunting events and creatures that definitely existed at the time, suggesting that these merfolk were actually witnessed rather than being a figment of the imagination.

Since then, stories have spread far and wide throughout time. Where there is sea water, there are invariably mermaid sightings. Unfortunately, such eyewitness accounts have been wrapped up with mythological fables and it is difficult to extricate the supposed genuine sightings from the ancient tales of water-based gods and goddesses.

Ancient Mesopotamian glyphs show merfolk swimming alongside gods and have been painted on water vessels as a purification talisman. Some claim that these



Mermaids are often depicted holding a mirror. Druids believed this was how they could see into the spirit world, while Christians said it represented vanity

MERMAID BABIES

In 2017, a YouTube channel called 'Interesting Facts', claimed to have footage of a baby mermaid. The post, entitled 'Baby Born With Mermaid Tail' shows a little girl with her legs joined together, forming a 'tail'. Although the images looked like a magical mermaid baby, it was in fact a little girl suffering from sirenomelia, or Mermaid Syndrome. The condition is a rare congenital foetal anomaly that often ends in the death of the infant and in no way proves the existence of real mermaids.

Milagros Cerron from Peru, underwent a five-hour operation in order to separate her 'tail' into two legs. She sadly died years later, waiting for a kidney

Amphitrite was the goddess of the sea in Greek mythology. She is clearly depicted as a mermaid-like creature, adding to the confusion of cryptid and fable

Unveiled in 1913, the bronze Little Mermaid statue is Copenhagen's biggest attraction, visited by over 1 million tourists per year

'Kuliltu' are the first named mermaids but the mythology surrounding them means most cryptozoologists consider them as nothing more than stories.

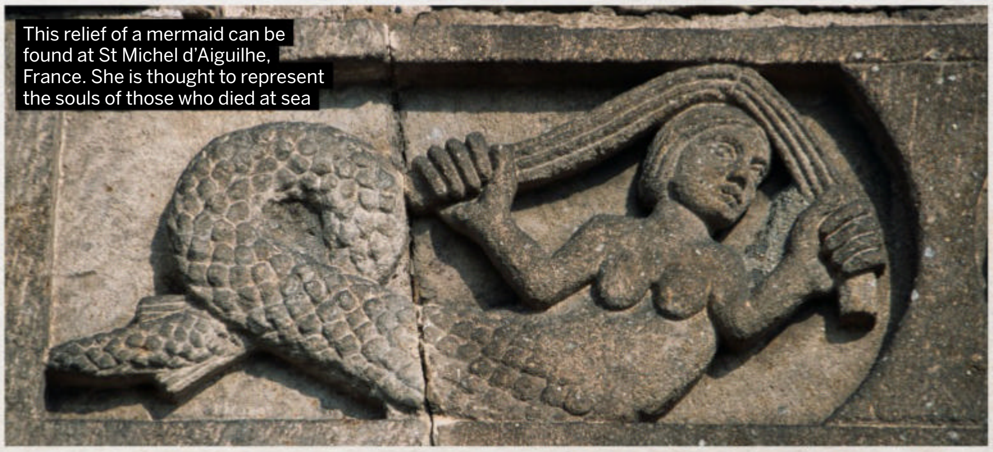
Explorer, Christopher Columbus, claimed to have spotted mermaids while sailing across the Caribbean waters. On 9 January, 1493, he saw three mermaids cavorting in the waves around his ship. He later wrote in his journal that "they are not half as beautiful as they are painted". Clearly these creatures did not match the enticing depiction of mermaids drawn in medieval manuscripts. These images show the naked torso of a woman with a smooth tail of a fish, long flowing ringlets and a beatific face, similar to today's interpretation. However, unlike mermaids such as Disney's Ariel, these creatures were not to be trusted. Sailors in particular, were fearful of steering their ships too close to a mermaid since it had the power to hypnotise. Once in the mermaid's clutches, she would drag you under until you drowned, revealing her true vile countenance.

Once again, the notion of real mermaids has been blended with the Greek mythology of the cruel Sirens, beautiful sea creatures that could captivate their audience with a song and then suffocate them.

So what was it that Columbus really saw? Some zoologists believe this encounter was actually the first written record of the manatees of North America. These gorgeous marine beasts, also known as Sea Cows, live in the Amazon basin rivers, across the Gulf of Mexico, and in the Caribbean Sea. Since they are extremely curious creatures, they are always fascinated by boats and human voices, coming up to the surface so that they might get a closer look. A glimpse of their silvery white bodies and paddle-shaped tail could easily be mistaken for a mermaid.

Similar to the manatee is the dugong, another marine mammal, that lives in waters spanning 40 different countries across the Indo-West Pacific. Like the manatee, dugong have been closely identified with mermaids. In Malay they are known as perempoen laut, meaning 'women of the sea'. So does this mean that mermaids don't really exist? Well, not necessarily.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration categorically states that there is no such thing as a mermaid in our waters but let's not forget that only one-quarter of the ocean floor has been mapped so far. Who could say what is lurking in the other three-quarters? If you are still not convinced then consider this. The fish was the first animal with a backbone, which means any creature with a backbone derives from fish. When looking at our genetic DNA, it becomes clear that humans are more than 50 percent fish. Maybe cryptozoologists simply need to look in the mirror to see a genuine mermaid.



This relief of a mermaid can be found at St Michel d'Aiguilhe, France. She is thought to represent the souls of those who died at sea

Images © Getty Images, Alamy

COLD-BLOODED HALF-MEN

They may not be able to generate their own body temperature, but these cryptids can generate people's interest!

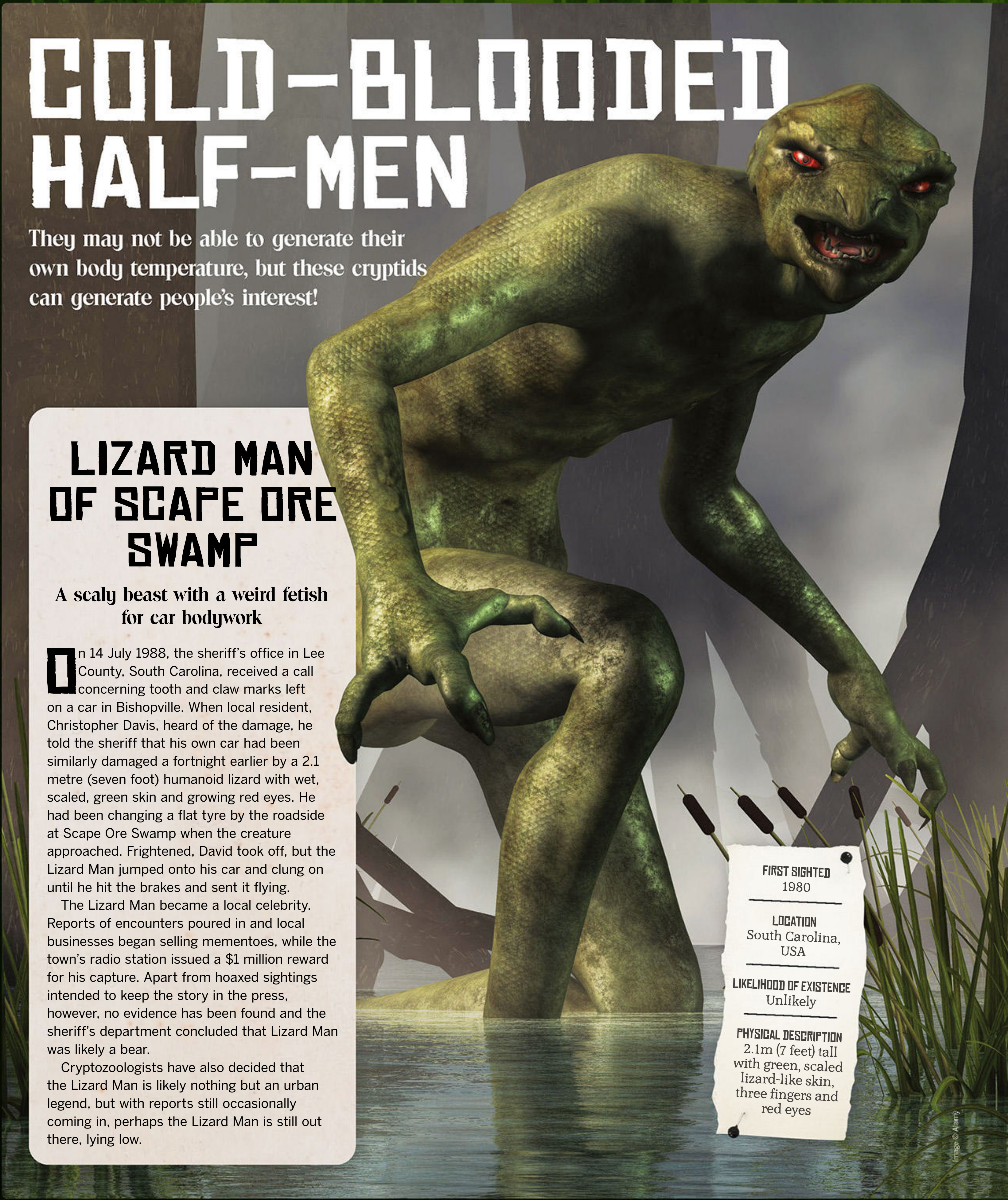


Image © Alamy

LIZARD MAN OF SCAPE ORE SWAMP

A scaly beast with a weird fetish for car bodywork

On 14 July 1988, the sheriff's office in Lee County, South Carolina, received a call concerning tooth and claw marks left on a car in Bishopville. When local resident, Christopher Davis, heard of the damage, he told the sheriff that his own car had been similarly damaged a fortnight earlier by a 2.1 metre (seven foot) humanoid lizard with wet, scaled, green skin and growing red eyes. He had been changing a flat tyre by the roadside at Scape Ore Swamp when the creature approached. Frightened, David took off, but the Lizard Man jumped onto his car and clung on until he hit the brakes and sent it flying.

The Lizard Man became a local celebrity. Reports of encounters poured in and local businesses began selling mementoes, while the town's radio station issued a $1 million reward for his capture. Apart from hoaxed sightings intended to keep the story in the press, however, no evidence has been found and the sheriff's department concluded that Lizard Man was likely a bear.

Cryptozoologists have also decided that the Lizard Man is likely nothing but an urban legend, but with reports still occasionally coming in, perhaps the Lizard Man is still out there, lying low.

FIRST SIGHTED
1980

LOCATION
South Carolina, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
2.1m (7 feet) tall with green, scaled lizard-like skin, three fingers and red eyes

LOVELAND FROG

A frogman or an unfortunate iguana?

FIRST SIGHTED
1955

LOCATION
Ohio, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's Still Out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
4 feet (1.2m) tall biped humanoid frog; webbed hands and feet

Image Wiki CC. Credit Tim Bertelink

In 1955, a travelling salesman was driving along a lonely road in Loveland, Ohio, when his headlamps picked out a trio of figures. As he passed them, he saw what he described as three frog-like humanoids, standing at approximately 1.2 metres (four feet) tall. With leathery skin and outsized frog heads, they stood on two legs, their feet and hand webbed.

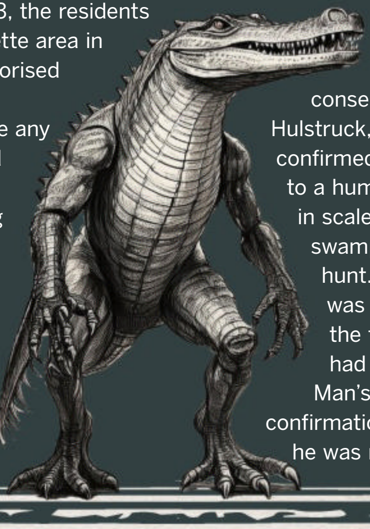
In the early hours of 3 March 1972, a Loveland police officer reported that a humanoid frog had bounded across the road in front of his vehicle. While his description matched closely to those of the salesman, when his colleague, Mark Matthews, saw something similar a couple of weeks later, he shot and killed the creature. The beast was nothing more remarkable than a one-metre-3.5-foot long iguana, missing its tail. Matthews confirmed his colleague agreed this was the 'frogman' he had seen in the road.

Despite the seemingly innocent explanation, the Loveland Frog has continued to be a favourite among cryptid-spotters in Ohio. As Officer Matthews has pointed out, when his eyewitness account is reported, more often than not, his admission that it was nothing but an iguana is usually left out of the story.

> THE BEAST WAS NOTHING MORE REMARKABLE THAN AN IGUANA MISSING ITS TAIL

NEW JERSEY GATOR MAN

This cryptid comes with an official stamp of approval!



Right: Image generated in Adobe Firefly AI.

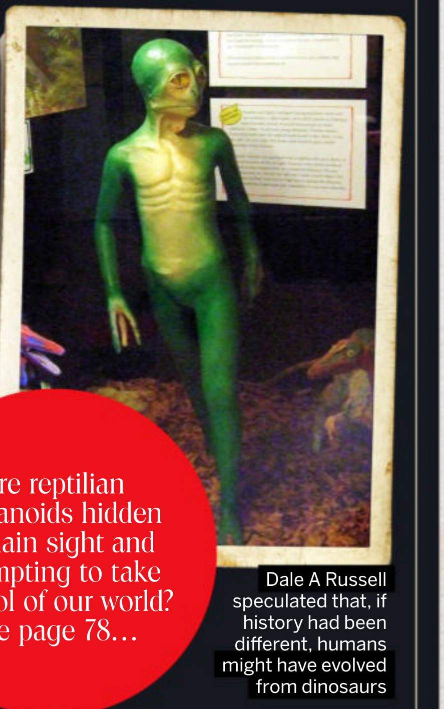
In the summer of 1973, the residents of the Newton-Lafayette area in New Jersey were terrorised by reports of a massive alligator. While not unlike any regular gator in size and shape, its body covered in thick skin and its long snout filled with razor-sharp teeth, one thing marked this alligator out as different. This alligator was a biped gatorman, walking on two legs like a human.

Though no physical evidence was ever found, in 1977 New York City conservation naturalist, Alfred Hulstruck, issued a report in which he confirmed that New Jersey was home to a humanoid creature covered in scales that emerged from the swamps at night to forage and hunt. Though nothing further was said on the matter, the fact that a city official had acknowledged Gator Man's existence was the only confirmation some people needed that he was really out there.

WHAT IF WE HADN'T EVOLVED FROM MONKEYS?

In 1982, Dale A Russell, a curator at the National Museum of Canada, put forward a theory that, if a dinosaur such as stenonychosaurus had not become extinct in the Cretaceous–Paleogene period, its descendants might have evolved into a very different sort of human. Central to the theory was the steady increase in the species' relative brain weight to its body size, which was six times that of other dinosaurs, and the conjecture that if this trend of growth continued, its brain would now be comparable to that of a human.

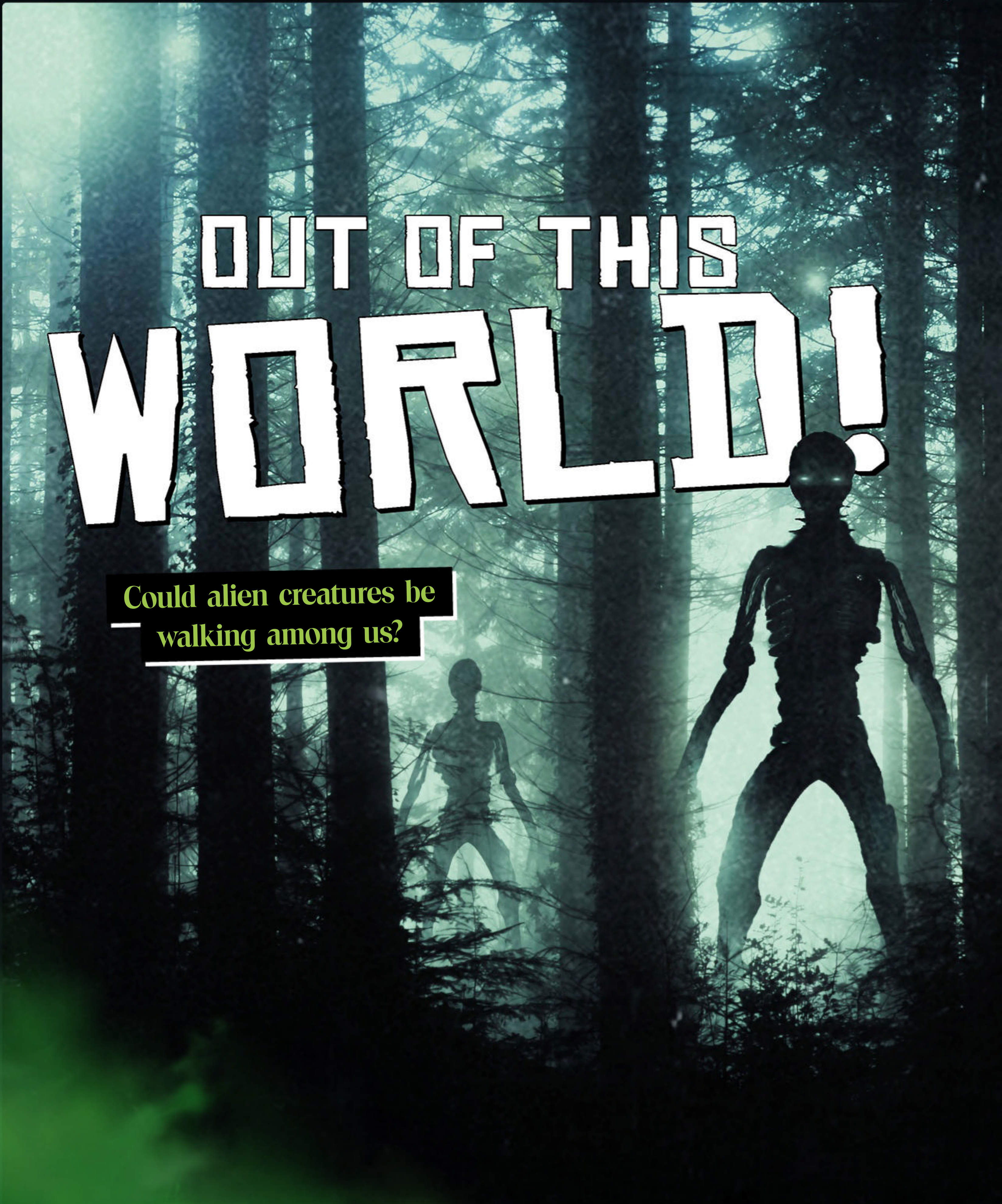
Russell's theory attracted criticism from other palaeontologists, who raised doubts about the anthropomorphism of the so-called Dinosauroid, particularly his conjecture that they might have evolved human-like hands. However, it attracted many fans too, and became a staple of alternative theories of evolution. It has also inspired artists, writers and storytellers, who have incorporated the Dinosauroid into sculpture, art and alternative history.



Dale A Russell speculated that, if history had been different, humans might have evolved from dinosaurs

Image Wiki CC. Credit Jim Linwood

Are reptilian humanoids hidden in plain sight and attempting to take control of our world? See page 78…



OUT OF THIS WORLD!

Could alien creatures be walking among us?

© Getty Images

While plenty of cryptids are attributed supernatural powers, there are some that defy belief that they could possibly be Earthly beings. Therefore, the only plausible explanation is to assume that they are actually aliens from another planet. Some have even been spotted in conjunction with flying saucers, only adding fuel to the fire that aliens are among us. This raises the question as to whether cryptid sightings are in fact extraterrestrial encounters and not evolutionary anomalies, surviving extinct species or undiscovered native animals at all.

Technically, any alien allegedly sighted is a cryptid, ie a living species that has been reportedly seen but remains currently unknown to science. During the 20th century, reports of close encounters with extraterrestrial beings came flooding in across the globe. While the first tales of humans directly encountering extraterrestrial intelligence date back thousands of years, during the 20th century, reports of both unidentified flying objects and strange, often humanoid, creatures that were alleged to have arrived from another planet began to increase. By the 1950s, numerous reports of close contact emerged, including claims of abductions, and witnesses began describing their encounters with beings they could only believe were alien races. By the 1990s conspiracy theories were off the chart, with rumours spreading like wildfire about the most commonly alleged alien species – many of which we look at here – their common traits, behaviours, temperaments, and of course, their purpose on Earth. Most are humanoid in form but many have supernatural abilities such as telekinesis, shape-shifting or telepathic powers. Some are thought to have nefarious intentions, performing scientific experiments on human victims or infiltrating Earth in order to invade and take control over our planet, while others are seen as mostly benevolent beings here to educate or warn us.

THE GREYS

Think of an alien being and chances are you'll imagine a Grey

In 1896 Stockton, California, became the location of the very first reported abduction attempt. While riding a horse-drawn buggy back from Lodi after dark, two men saw three human-like, two-metre (seven-foot) tall, slender, naked beings covered in fine, silky hair. The beings possessed "strange and indescribable beauty", with small ears, noses with the "appearance of polished ivory", tiny mouths, "large and lustrous" eyes and no head or facial hair. Of all alien types, these seem most aligned with descriptions of Tall Greys.

Greys are usually described as short (0.9 metres / 2.9 feet), slender, hairless, grey-skinned humanoids. Their features have become synonymous with a stereotypical alien – large black almond-shaped eyes, a lipless mouth, nostrils but no nose, no ears, three or four fingers and a bulbous skull. They are the predominant type of alien described in alleged close encounters and abductions in America, with a whopping 73 per cent of all US reports describing Greys as their abductors. They are often attributed telepathic abilities, are the primary pilots of flying saucer-shaped UFOs and are often accused of being behind cattle mutilations. Tall Greys, similar to the humanoids witnessed in 1896, reportedly have authority over the smaller ones. Their goal is said to create alien-human hybrids, which they then introduce into Earth's population for reasons unknown to us.

Grey aliens' appearance is very similar to that of HG Wells' imagining of a further evolved human in his 1893 novel, *The Man Of The Year Million*, and the Eloi, a futuristic post-human race in *The Time Machine* (1895). In 1917, infamous occultist Aleister Crowley made contact with an entity named Lam, who he described as looking like a Grey alien and having the disposition of a Vulcan – "cold, computer-like intelligence", and was thought to be a being from outer space or another dimension. In 1965, Barney and Betty Hill made headlines when they claimed they had been abducted by Greys in 1951, and they are often linked to the Roswell incident of 1947, in which a flying disc allegedly crash-landed in the desert of New Mexico.

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Mostly USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Short grey-coloured bald humanoids

REPTILIANS

Hailing from the Draco or Orion constellations or perhaps another dimension, Reptilians are shape-shifters and have supposedly taken on the human form of most of our world's most powerful people, in their bid to control the Earth. Some say they harvest human pain for energy. This race of beings are very similar to *Conan The Barbarian* author, Robert E Howard's, 'serpent men', featured in his story, 'The Shadow Kingdom'. Howard's creatures have the head of a serpent but the body of a human and are able to control minds and shape-shift in order to infiltrate humanity. They were heavily influenced by the work of Russian mystic Helena Blavatsky – in particular her 1888 pseudoscientific esoteric book, *The Secret Doctrine*, in which she speaks of the lost worlds of Atlantis and Lemuria, the latter of which she theorised was once home to a mighty civilisation of "dragon-men". During the 1940s, occultist Maurice Doreal described serpent humanoid creatures that could imitate humans in his pamphlet, 'Mysteries Of The Gobi'. British conspiracy theorist, David Icke, has since expanded on the idea, theorising that most of the world's ruling classes are actually reptile-like humanoid beings, including the British monarchy and the Bush family, put in power to manipulate and control humanity – eerily like the plot of John Carpenter's science-fiction horror classic, *They Live*.

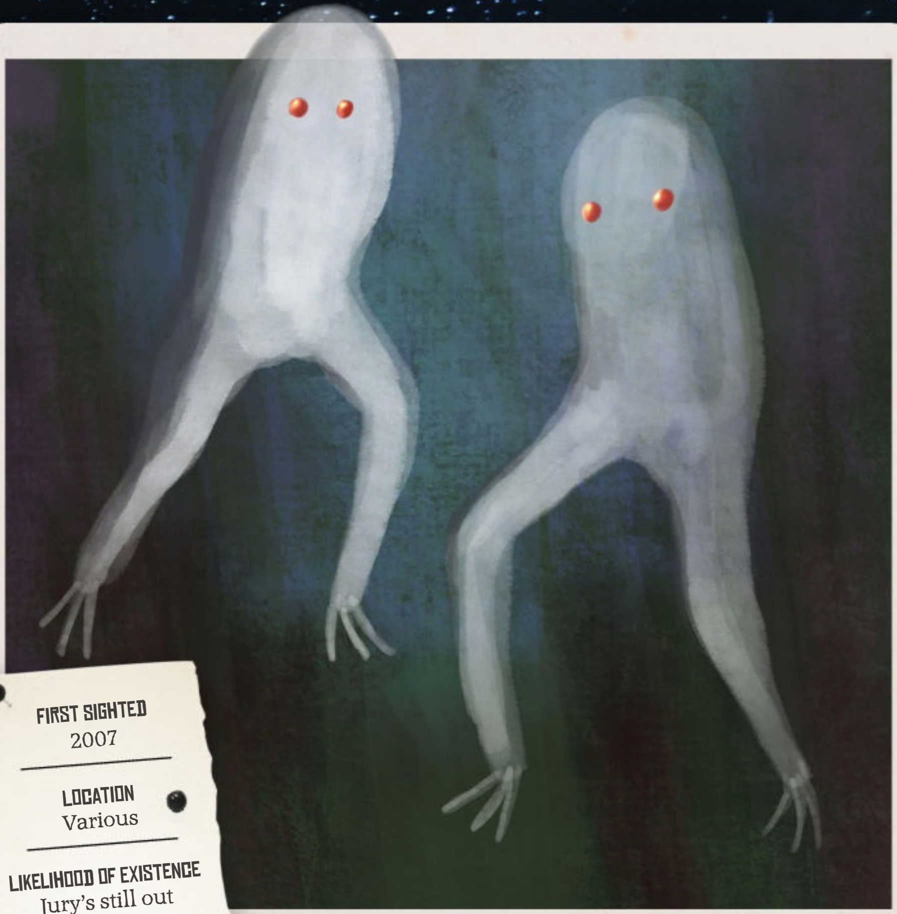
If controlling our politics and mass media isn't enough, Reptilians have been known to abduct humans. In 1967, Herbert Schirmer claimed to have been taken aboard a UFO by humanoid, reptilian-looking beings.

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Various

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Default form is hybrid, either body of man with head of snake or humanoid with reptilian characteristics



FRESNO NIGHTCRAWLER

A leggy creature that seems to enjoy going out for walks at night

FIRST SIGHTED
2007

LOCATION
Various

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
White or grey figure that seems to be a pair of legs with a small head. Usually tall, but shorter ones have been reported

The Fresno Nightcrawler was first captured on film by one terrified Fresno man known only as José, who brought grainy CCTV footage of his front lawn to Spanish language television network Univision in 2007.

José was seeking the advice of a paranormal expert as his surveillance camera showed what seems to be an animated, glowing pair of trousers strolling across his front lawn at night. In the video you can make out a tall, white stick figure that appears to be nothing but legs, with backward-bending knees and a small indistinguishable head with no arms or torso, casting a shadow as it crosses the yard. Four years later, in 2011, two similar but much shorter figures were caught on camera in nearby Yosemite Lakes Park. They also seemed to sport some sort of webbing connecting from their knees to their upper body.

Since then numerous sightings of tall, slender, white creatures with no arms or torso have been reported. In 2014, a 60-year-old former marine reported a tall, "slim, grey creature with muscular legs that walked like its knees were backwards" in Carmel, Ohio, which has since become known as the Carmel Area Creature. A tape has since surfaced of a cryptid similar to the Yosemite aliens filmed all the way in Poland and in 2020, another home surveillance system in Billings, Montana captured the creature. Is it a bird? Is it a crane? Many suspect it could be. Other explanations include a misidentified deer. But, since it doesn't really resemble any creature on this planet, many are of the opinion that the Nightcrawler is most likely a rather shy, benevolent extraterrestrial.

> HIS SURVEILLANCE CAMERA SHOWED WHAT SEEMS TO BE AN ANIMATED PAIR OF TROUSERS

NORDICS

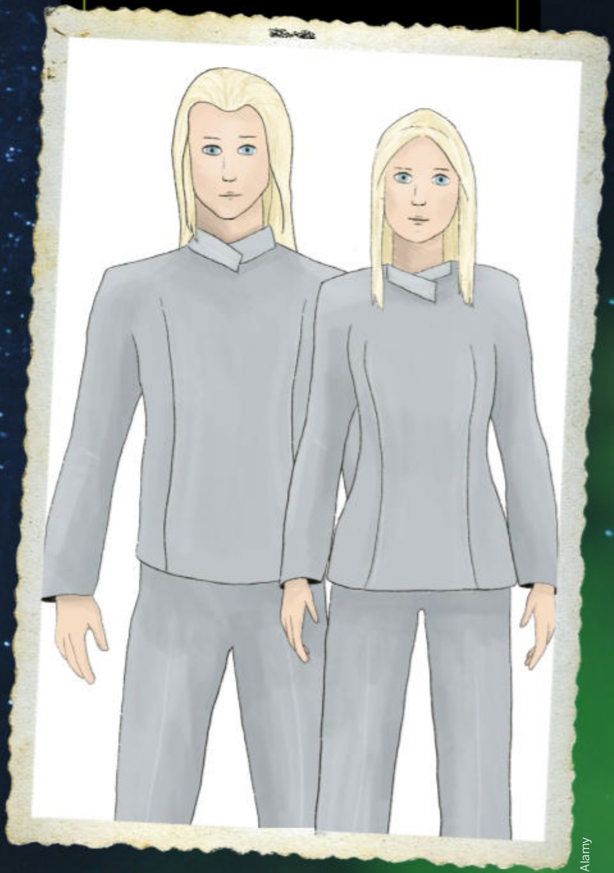
FIRST SIGHTED
1950s

LOCATION
Mainly Europe

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Strikingly beautiful, tall (1.8-2.1m (6-7ft)), blonde or white-haired, fair-skinned, blue-eyed 'humans'

Nordics are aliens that for all intents and purposes appear to be human. However, they look like the most attractive stereotypical Scandinavian, or 'Aryan' you'd ever meet. According to reports from contactees, they also possess telepathic abilities. Unlike most reported alien species, they are benevolent and are concerned with saving our planet and helping us achieve world peace. They are most commonly encountered in Europe, as opposed to the Americas, where Greys reign supreme (at least when it comes to abductions).



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HOPKINSVILLE GOBLINS

Did two families witness alien visitors, or was this a case of mass hysteria?

These curious aliens, described as goblin-like creatures, standing between 60cm (two feet) to 1.2 metres (four feet), with large pointed ears, claw-like hands, yellow glowing eyes and scrawny legs, terrorised two American families in the 1950s before disappearing, never to be seen again.

On 21 August 1955, at approximately 11 in the evening, two cars pulled up at Hopkinsville police station in Kentucky. Five adults and seven children burst out of the vehicles in a panic, demanding help to fend off small aliens who had arrived in a spaceship and were attacking their farmhouse. Two of the adults, Elmer Sutton and Billy Ray Taylor, claimed that short, dark figures had been repeatedly popping up at their windows and doorways and they'd been forced to open gunfire upon what they could only assume were extraterrestrials. Four local police officers attended the scene along with five state troopers, four military police officers and three deputy sheriffs in order to prevent a possible gun fight, but when they arrived at the farm, near Kelly in Christian County, there was no trace of any spacecrafts or creatures, just evidence of the gunfire the men had already admitted to.

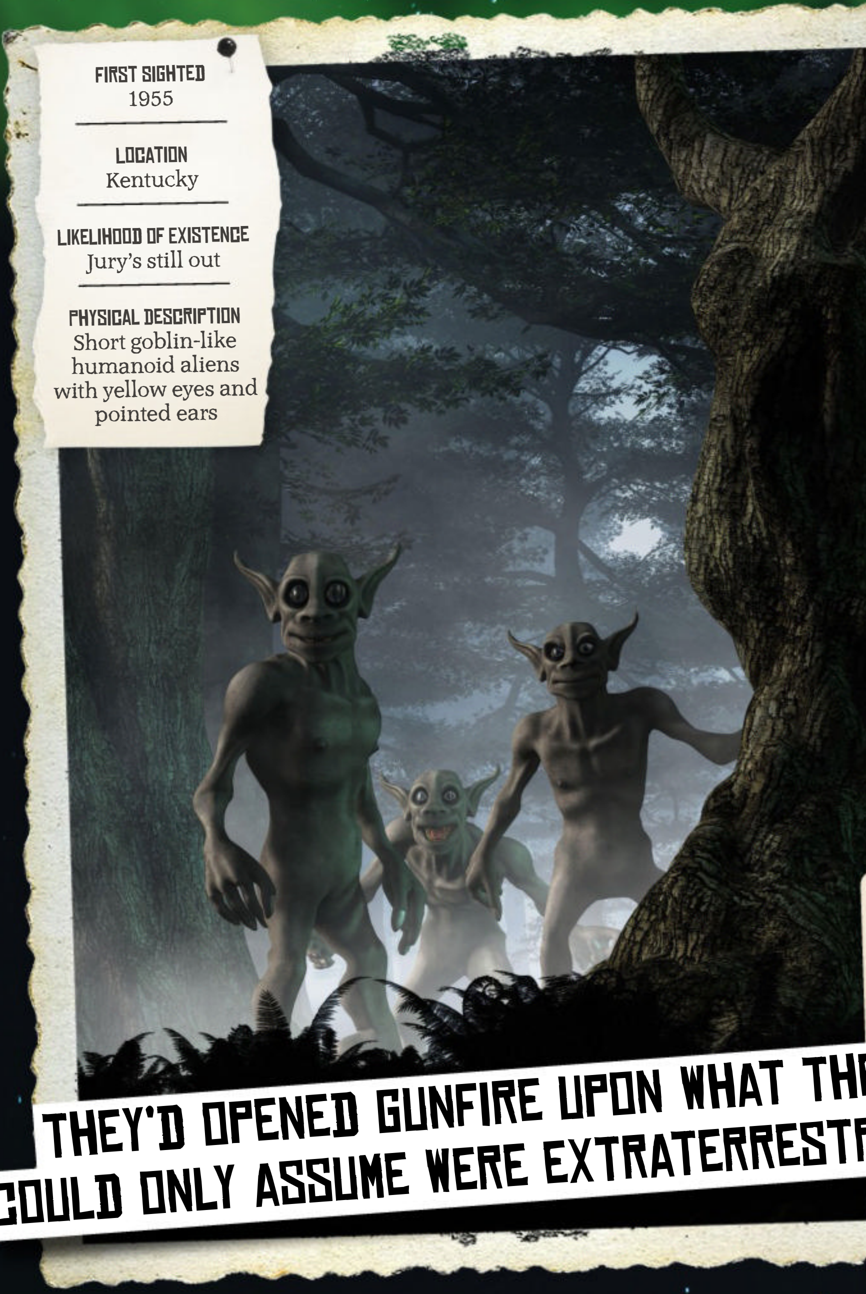
The next day, the farmhouse was found abandoned with neighbours reporting that the residents had claimed the beings had returned in the early hours of the morning before they fled the scene. The incident was labelled a hoax by the US Air Force in their Project Blue Book files (a top secret research study into unidentified flying objects), and skeptics consider it to be an isolated example of mass hysteria, whereby 'the effects of excitement' caused the families to misidentify great horned owls, who are known to aggressively defend their nests and sport yellow eyes.

FIRST SIGHTED
1955

LOCATION
Kentucky

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Short goblin-like humanoid aliens with yellow eyes and pointed ears



THEY'D OPENED GUNFIRE UPON WHAT THEY COULD ONLY ASSUME WERE EXTRATERRESTRIALS

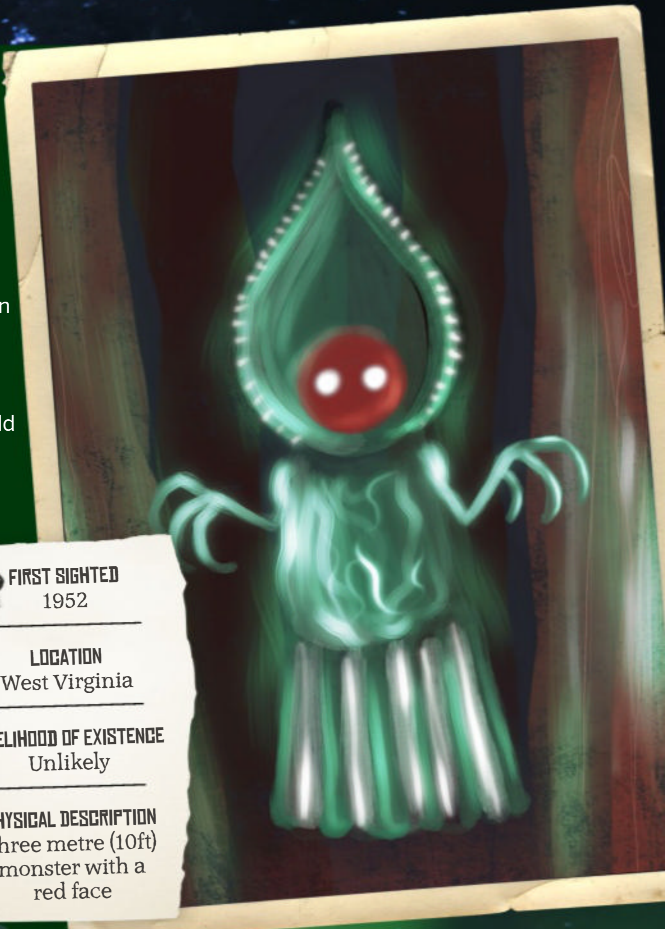
HOPKINSVILLE LEGACY

Known as the Kelly-Hopkinsville encounter, the event might seem an obscure and brief event but its legacy has endured. After hearing about it in the 1970s, legendary film-maker, Steven Spielberg, was inspired to write a treatment entitled 'Night Skies'. While this initial script – a sciencefiction horror film – would never see the light of day, Spielberg used elements of this material in a variety of his projects during the 1980s. The initial script was rewritten to mimic the atmosphere of his 1977 film, *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*, becoming family-friendly *ET The Extra-Terrestrial*, while the family-under-siege narrative was used in both 1982's Poltergeist (where the aliens became ghosts) and 1984's *Gremlins* (where he replaced aliens with small fictional creatures dubbed Mogwai). The 1986 comedy-horror *Critters* is also loosely based on the incident.

THE FLATWOODS MONSTER

At 7.15pm on 12 September 1952, in the small town of Flatwoods in Braxton County, West Virginia, three teenage boys were playing in their schoolyard when they saw something red and fiery fly across the sky, appearing to crash at a local farm. One of the boys fetched his mother, Mrs May, and the group made its way over to the farm. Approaching the crash site through the woods, the group saw something that would haunt them forever. A creature emerged from the wreckage that was described by 17-year-old Gene Lemon as a "10ft monster with a blood-red body and a face that seemed to glow". Two vast beams of light appeared to project outward from its eyes and scour the dense mist. As the light from Lemon's torch hit the creature, they were able to see it more clearly. The monster was described as having a green body, and Mrs May said it had drape-like folds. (Some of the boys present disputed this, instead describing the creature as dark in colour.) Its face was round and red, with a hood-like shape surrounding it. The monster was only seen briefly before it let out a terrifying hiss and glided menacingly towards the group. In sheer terror, the boys and Mrs May fled through the trees.

A number of explanations have been given over the years for what the group saw. A meteor did pass over the village and was seen by numerous people, explaining the bright light in the sky. Ufologist Major Donald Keyhoe claimed that the US Air Force had sent two investigators, who determined that the meteor had "merely appeared to be landing when it disappeared over the hill". But what of the monster? According to Keyhoe, the investigators concluded that the creature was "probably a large owl perched on a limb". Various other accounts and the work of sceptic Joe Nickell would seem to corroborate this, but the legend of the Flatwoods Monster lives on and today the little town remains a popular tourist attraction.



FIRST SIGHTED
1952

LOCATION
West Virginia

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Three metre (10ft) monster with a red face

DOVER DEMON

Spotted southwest of downtown Boston by three teenagers in 1977, the Dover Demon was named and initially investigated by cryptozoologist Loren Coleman. He then enlisted other well-known ufological researchers, including the assistant director of the Hayden Planetarium at Boston's Science Museum, Walter Webb, to assist him in examining the witnesses.

On 21 April, 17-year-old Bill Bartlett reported seeing an alien-like creature crawling along a stone wall on Farm Street while driving through Dover with his two friends. Bartlett first assumed the critter was a cat or a dog, but upon closer inspection he saw that it was hairless with rough, sandpaper-like tanned skin. The creature sported a large, bulbous, watermelon-shaped head and glass-like, illuminated, orange eyes with no other discernible facial features. Its limbs were long and thin and it used its tendril-like fingers to grasp the pavement.

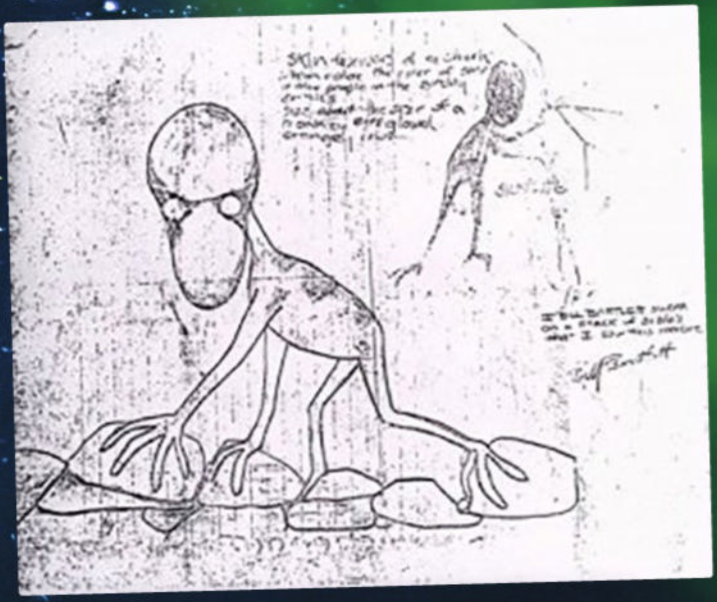
FIRST SIGHTED
1977

LOCATION
Boston

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Bulbous head, thin limbs, tendril-like fingers

An hour later, 15-year-old John Baxter and 13-year-old Pete Mitchell also saw the alien run into a gully on Miller Hill Road. On 22 April, 15-year-old Abby Brabham and 18-year-old Will Traintor reported the same creature on Springdale Avenue. Brabham's description matched those of Bartlett and Baxter, but she claimed the being had green, not orange, eyes that were reflected by the car headlights. She also claimed that it was about the size of a goat. Bartlett, Baxter, Brabham and Traintor all drew a sketch of the alleged alien, with Bartlett noting, "I, Bill Bartlett, swear on a stack of Bibles that I saw this creature" on the piece of paper on which he drew the creature. Other witnesses have since claimed that the Dover Demon has smooth, chalky grey flesh, the ability to become transparent or translucent and makes a noise that sounds like a cross between a hawk's screech and a snake's hiss. It is thought to wait in the trees, leaping out to terrify passersby.



While many sceptics believe that the Dover Demon is merely a hoax, concocted by bored teenagers during school vacation and inspired by contemporary popular culture, others believe it was a misidentified snowy owl, a foal or a moose calf.

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WEREWOLVES

When a wolf howls by the light of a full moon, it can only mean one thing: a werewolf is stalking the night

The myth of the werewolf, or lycanthrope, is one that goes back centuries. Though subject to cultural and geographical variations, there is one thing that werewolves usually have in common: they are humans who can turn into a wolf or human-wolf hybrid, under the influence of a full moon. There are all kinds of ways someone can become a werewolf, but once in the grip of lycanthropy, it is a life sentence. Every full moon, the animal will emerge.

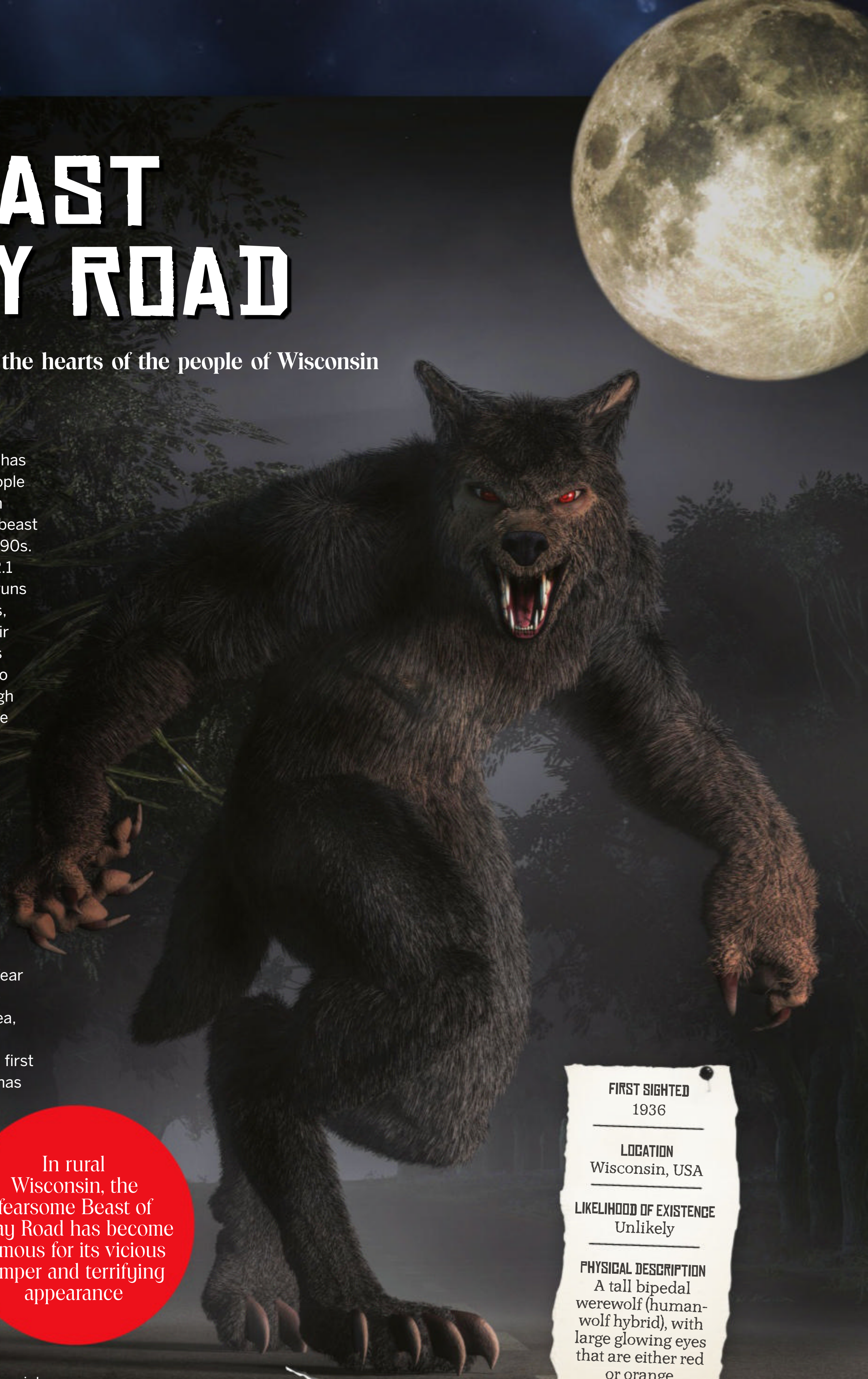
The first references to humans becoming wolves can be found in the literature of Ancient Greece but lycanthropy as we know it, where the ancestors of our modern werewolves can be found, emerged from the Middle Ages. In medieval Europe, belief in werewolves was so widespread that it was written into spiritual laws, in order to ensure that God would protect the faithful. As the centuries wore on, the accusation of lycanthropy was a popular one at witchcraft trials, as well as in cases of murder or other violent crime.

In modern times, the image of a human becoming a werewolf when a full moon rises is a staple of popular culture. From movies to comic books, games and beyond, the werewolf has caught the popular imagination by the throat.

Tales of how a werewolf shifts can differ – some talk of creatures who can change their shape at will, while others state the change is at the mercy of a full moon. The latter is certainly the one that's most prevalent in popular culture

THE BEAST OF BRAY ROAD

His name has struck fear into the hearts of the people of Wisconsin for almost 100 years



For 90 years, the Beast of Bray Road has struck fear into the hearts of the people of Wisconsin. First spotted in 1936 in rural Jefferson, sightings of the terrifying beast peaked during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The fearsome creature is described as a 2.1 metre (seven feet) wolf-like creature that runs on four legs but can stand on its hind legs, walking as a bipedal entity. Dishevelled hair or fur and glowing red eyes only add to its monstrous appearance. Witnesses claim to have seen it running at great speed through the corn fields or devouring road kill on the verge of Bray Road in the city of Elkhorn, Walworth County. While most encounters occur at night, some have been chased in their cars during daylight. The creature has also been spotted further afield in Spring Prairie and Lyons. Mutilated deer and livestock, as well as strange claw marks across car doors are attributed to this particularly vicious cryptid.

The Beast of Bray Road has become a local celebrity as the subject of a low-budget movie, but residents of Jefferson fear that it isn't to be trifled with. Many believe that the beast has brought evil to their area, resulting in a spate of apparently Satanic animal mutilations in the 1980s. Since the first reported sighting in the 1930s, the beast has appeared to many witnesses in Wisconsin and sightings continue to be reported well into the 21st century. It has clawed at the vehicles of terrified motorists, made aggressive charges at victims who were lucky to escape and even pursued children who were playing in the snow.

Some brave locals have tried to capture evidence of the Beast of Bray Road on tape, leaving roadkill as bait to tempt it into the open. Their cameras have captured nothing more than mist and a questionable wolf-like creature that has been widely dismissed as a hoax. However, with sightings continuing across Wisconsin, the Beast of Bray Road looks likely to keep cryptid-spotters on their toes for a while yet.

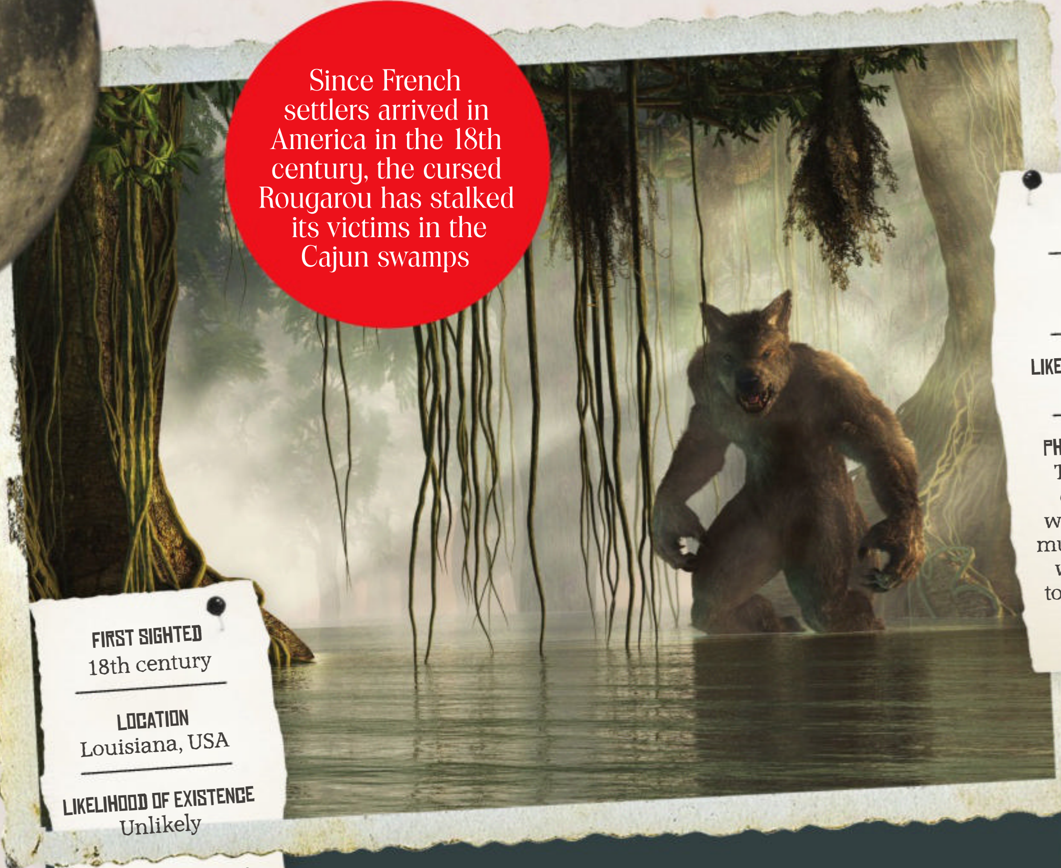
In rural Wisconsin, the fearsome Beast of Bray Road has become famous for its vicious temper and terrifying appearance

FIRST SIGHTED
1936

LOCATION
Wisconsin, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
A tall bipedal werewolf (human-wolf hybrid), with large glowing eyes that are either red or orange



Since French settlers arrived in America in the 18th century, the cursed Rougarou has stalked its victims in the Cajun swamps

FIRST SIGHTED
18th century

LOCATION
Louisiana, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Muscular biped with fur-covered human body, a wolf's head, sharp teeth and claws and glowing eyes

THE ROUGAROU

Is this Cajun lycanthrope lurking in the swamps of Louisiana?

The Rougarou came to the Cajun bayous in the 18th century, brought by French settlers. This cursed human has broken their Lenten vows seven years in a row and is doomed to transform into a Rougarou every night for 101 days, after which the curse will pass to another victim whose blood has been spilled by the beast. The Rougarou stalks the swamps of New Orleans in search of victims, in some cases hunting down Catholics who have also broken their Lenten vows. The Rougarou doesn't need a full moon either, for 101 nights, the swamp is its hunting ground.

Heavily muscled, the Rougarou's body is covered in dark fur; though its physique is mostly human, its hands end in sharp claws. Definitely not human, however, is its wolf's head and sharp canine teeth, while glowing eyes blaze from their sockets. The Rougarou attacks any cattle and humans who cross its path. Although it has been part of Cajun folklore for centuries, sightings continue in the modern age. As recently as 2016, a resident in Houma, Louisiana captured a huge humanoid figure with glowing eyes prowling through a residential neighbourhood by night. Locals have reported the sound of growls in the night and red eyes glaring at them from the depths of the swamp. However, since the Rougarou has become the focal point of an annual festival in Houma, perhaps it was just stopping by for the party!

> "LOCALS HAVE REPORTED THE SOUND OF GROWLS IN THE NIGHT"

LOUGAROU

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Haiti

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Tall humanoid, covered in fur, with an imposing muscular frame, as well as a sharp-toothed wolf head and red eyes

On the Caribbean country of Haiti, creatures of folklore stalk the shadows, with whispers of voodoo and zombies following them through the night. Some believe it unwise to go out at night, in case they encounter the Lougarou, the Haitian werewolf who is a cousin of the Cajun Rougarou. These shape-shifting humans are often the victims of curses, destined to shed their skin at night and take various animal forms including that of a wolf, fearsome in appearance and intimidating in size and build. They can move stealthily and with surprising speed, often peering out of the darkness with their red eyes. Frequently associated with females, the Lougarou has a lust for blood and often satisfies that bloodlust by harming children and babies. When morning comes, they put on their human skin once more.

Following the 2010 Haiti earthquake, rumours of prowling Lougarous were reported by terrified survivors, who feared for their safety as they slept on the streets. In 2016, meanwhile, a suspect in the murder of three deaf women claimed that the victims were Lougarous, with their hearing loss being proof of the curse.

Shedding its skin to take on wolven form, the Haitian Lougarou prowls the Caribbean night, seeking children to sate its bloodlust

THE WEREWOLF OF WEREWOLF SPRINGS

Not long after the American Civil War, a circus train travelling through Tennessee's Montgomery Bell State Park derailed and two of its exhibits escaped into the night. Known as the Wolfmen of Borneo, they were never captured.

A few years later, two men were on a night walk when they realised they were being followed. Their pursuer was a Sasquatch-like creature that moved stealthily; they barely had time to take in its large, furred torso, razor teeth and claws before they made a run for it. The wolf-headed creature pounced on one man with terrifying agility and speed, killing him as the other made his escape. Armed townspeople went out to hunt the beast and though they lured it with a goat carcass, it fled before they could shoot it down.

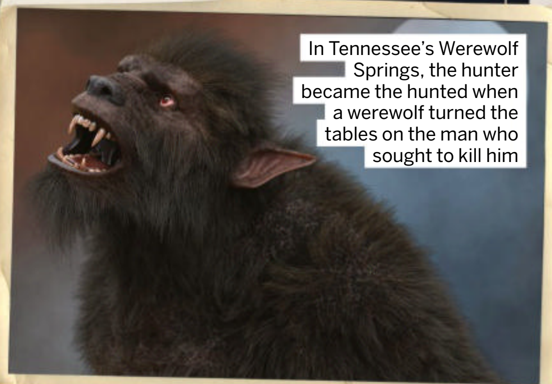
A little later, a hunter became the quarry when the werewolf burst into his cabin with a fearsome howl, clawing the door to matchwood. He was saved only by the rising sun, which caused his attacker to flee. Local lore claims that the werewolf is still haunting the region of Hall Springs, which is known today as Werewolf Springs. There he steals away cattle to eat and even, on occasion, unfortunate children.

FIRST SIGHTED
Mid-19th century

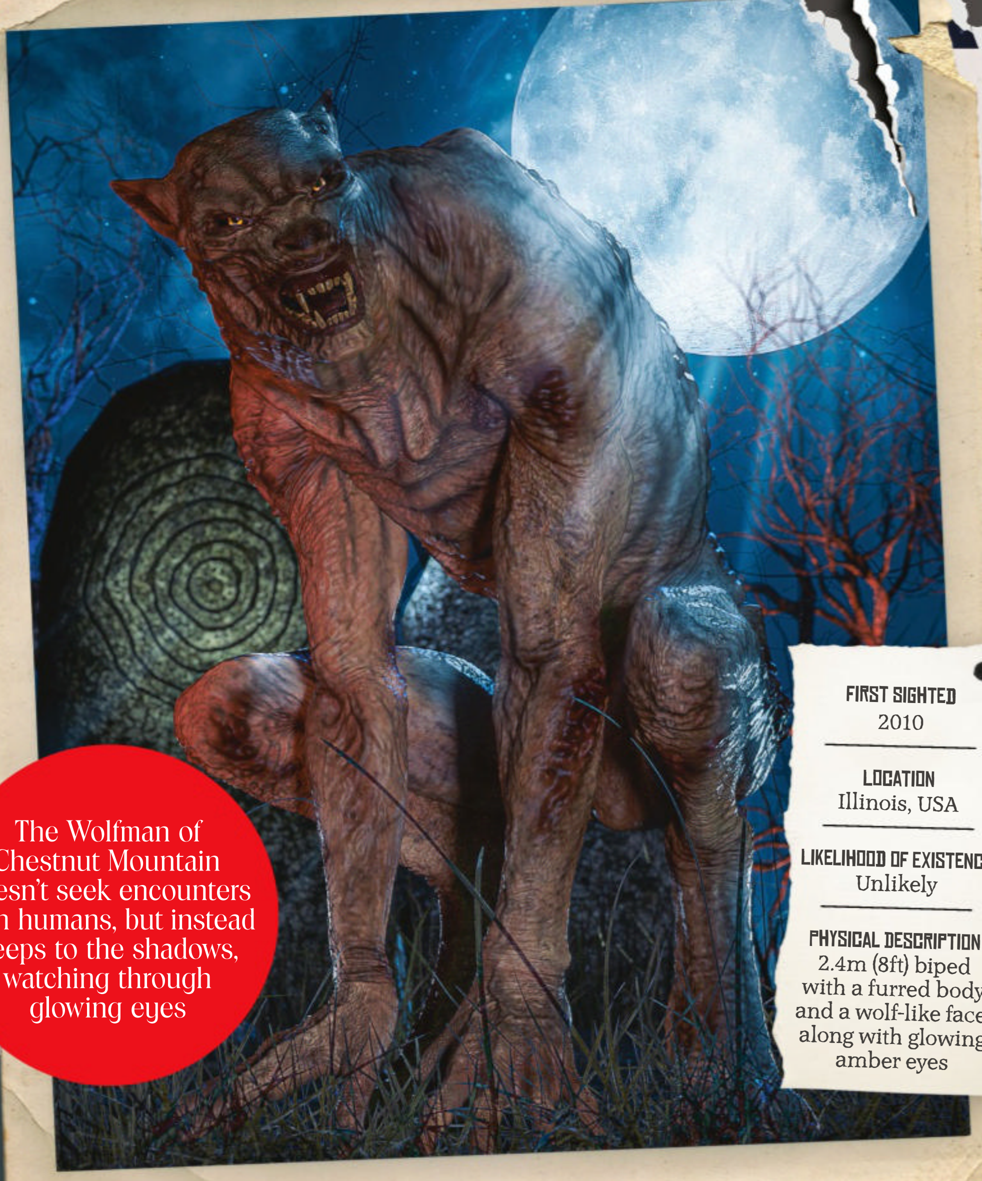
LOCATION
Tennessee, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Lumbering and physically imposing fur-covered biped, complete with large, razor-sharp teeth and claws



In Tennessee's Werewolf Springs, the hunter became the hunted when a werewolf turned the tables on the man who sought to kill him



The Wolfman of Chestnut Mountain doesn't seek encounters with humans, but instead keeps to the shadows, watching through glowing eyes

FIRST SIGHTED
2010

LOCATION
Illinois, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
2.4m (8ft) biped with a furred body and a wolf-like face, along with glowing amber eyes

WOLFMAN OF CHESTNUT MOUNTAIN

A shy creature who has a habit of leaving his mark in the paintwork of passing cars

In the Chestnut Mountain region of Galena, Illinois, in 2010, a couple driving through the night reported an unsettling encounter with a strange creature that was running in the trees alongside the road. At first they took it to be a bear, but as their headlamps illuminated the loping figure, they realised that they were looking at what appeared to be an abnormally large wolf, walking on its hind legs. Upon seeing them, the towering beast raced away into the night at inhuman speed.

That was just the first sighting of the beast, which stands at over 2.4 metres (eight feet). Resembling a wolf, witnesses reported it had claws at the end of human-like hands and its glowing amber eyes left them chilled to the bone. The Wolfman of Chestnut Mountain has so far kept his distance from people, but some motorists driving through the area have found that when they arrive at their destination, the paintwork of their car has deep scratches, etched by the talons of the beast.

MICHIGAN DOGMAN

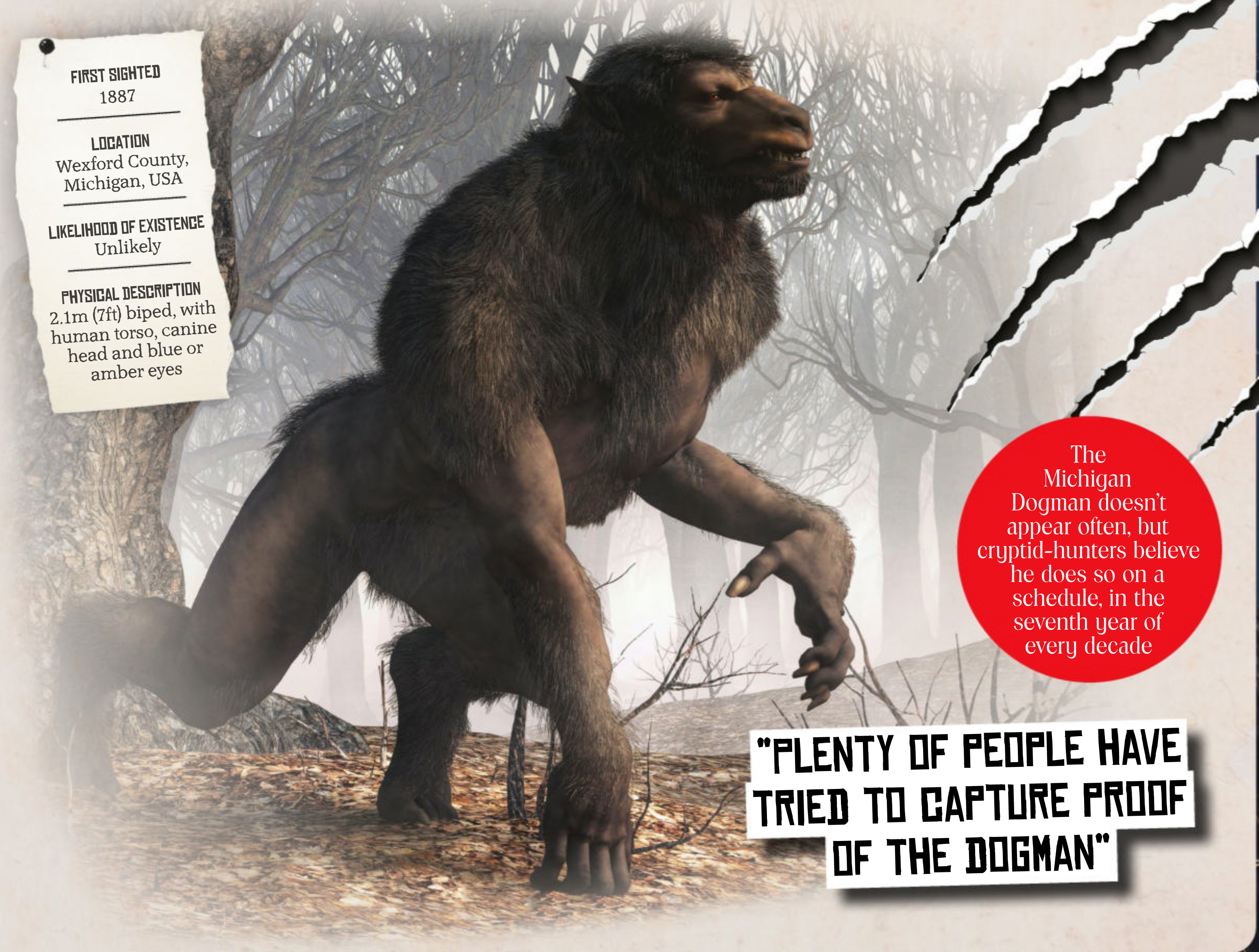
Making his appearance every ten years, this canine cryptid is generally considered to a non-aggressive creature

In 1887, two lumberjacks working in Michigan's isolated Wexford Country saw a strange hybrid figure, which appeared to stand at 2.4 metres (seven feet) tall and walked on two legs. Though its furred body appeared to be that of a human, its head was that of a dog. While witnesses disagree on whether the creature's eyes are blue or amber, all agree on one thing: its canine-like head. Though this encounter passed off peacefully, less pleasant was a second sighting that occurred in 1938 in Paris, Michigan. On that occasion, a man named Robert Fortney was attacked by a pack of wild dogs. In the midst of the terrifying encounter, he realised that one of the dogs was walking on two legs. Since then, sporadic reports have come in roughly every ten years, all of them describing the same human-dog hybrid witnessed in 1887.

For those who have studied the Michigan Dogman, there appears to be a pattern of sorts to his appearances. With the exception of his apparent sighting in 1938, the Dogman appears to pass through isolated areas of Michigan once every decade, in years that end with the number seven. In most of the reported encounters the story is similar – a creature that displays startling agility emerges from the woods and attempts to get into the witnesses' vehicles or homes. In recent decades, one shocked motorist called emergency services to report that the Dogman had bolted at his car, causing him to take evasive action that flipped the car onto its roof.

Though the Dogman might sound fearsome and his screaming howl is certainly bloodcurdling, he has become such a familiar sight in Michigan that films and novelty songs have been created to celebrate him. Plenty of people have tried to capture proof of the Dogman and in 2007, Mike Agrusa released the *Gable Film*, which purported to be a home video from the 1970s that showed the Dogman. The video went viral, but enthusiasts were disappointed when Agrusa admitted he was an actor and confessed the footage was a hoax.

Though similar in appearance to the Beast of Bray Road, the Michigan Dogman appears to be far less aggressive and many locals believe that simply clapping their hands is enough to frighten this particular cryptid away.



FIRST SIGHTED
1887

LOCATION
Wexford County, Michigan, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
2.1m (7ft) biped, with human torso, canine head and blue or amber eyes

The Michigan Dogman doesn't appear often, but cryptid-hunters believe he does so on a schedule, in the seventh year of every decade

"PLENTY OF PEOPLE HAVE TRIED TO CAPTURE PROOF OF THE DOGMAN"

BEASTS

These cryptids are often zoological nightmares – gigantic, supernatural versions of existing animals, hideous hybrids concocted of two or more known creatures or lingering survivors of an extinct species of wildlife that we'd rather remain in the past

90 Cryptid Beasts
Ahool, Glocester Ghoul, El Chupacabra, Dobhar-Chú, Hodag, Jackalope, Kasai Rex, African Water Elephant, Mongolian Death Worm, Nandi Bear, Ozark Howler, Sheepsquatch, Snallygaster, Van Meter Visitor, Thunderbird

100 Unicorn

102 The Big Dogs: Canine Cryptids
Black Shuck, Dire Wolf, Japanese Wold, Prime Hook Swamp Creature, Adjule, Andean Wolf

106 Big Cat Cryptids
Beast of Bodmin Moor, Beast of Bladenboro, Maltese Tiger, Tasmanian Tiger, Queensland Tiger, Alaskan Tiger, Zanzibar Leopard, Lemisch, Blue Mountains Panther, Marozi, Fiskerton Phantom

114 Denizens of the Deep: Water Monsters
Nessie, Morag, Bownessie, Tatzelwurm, Pepie, Storsjöodjuret, Lagarfljót Worm, The Lake Norman Monster, Chessie, Ogopogo, Champ, Walgren Lake Monster, Mokèlé-Mbèmbé, Nguma-Monene, Bunyip

FIRST SIGHTED
1925

LOCATION
Java, Indonesia

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Pure fiction

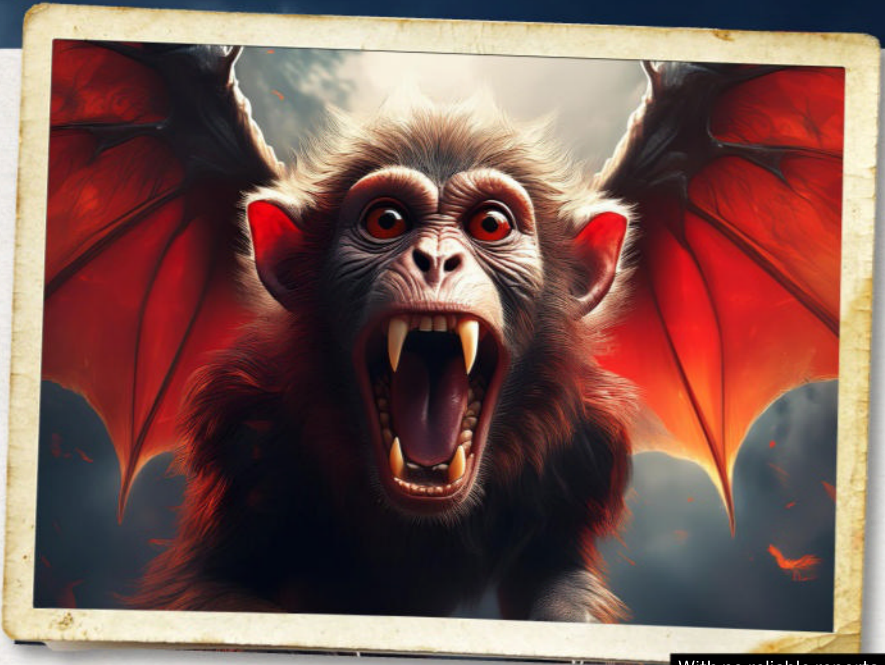
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Extremely large bat with primate-like face, large eyes, red-skinned wings, grey fur and clawed fingers. It also has an impressive wingspan of 5-9m (18-28ft)

AHOOL

In 1925, Dr Ernest Bartels was hiking beside a waterfall on Java's Mount Salak when an enormous bat flew overhead. Two years later, he encountered the bat again in Java, where he heard it give a distinctive cry of "ahool". This cry gave the beast its name.

The Ahool is huge in stature, approximately four times the size of the largest-known bat. Covered in grey fur, its breathtaking red-fleshed wingspan measures between five and nine metres (18-28 feet), ending in sharpened claws. Though the creature's body and wings are bat-like, its face is a combination of a bat and a primate, chimpanzee-like in nature.

While sightings are rare, it is believed that the Ahool eats large fish and cattle and may snatch humans when able to catch them unawares or when under threat. It may be related to the Ropen, a pterosaur-like cryptid that can be found in New Guinea, though some cryptid enthusiasts have posited that the Ahool might share a common ancestor with the pterosaur-esque Kongamato, which has been reported from some regions of Africa.


With no reliable reports for a century,the Ahool remains a tantalisingly mysterious creature of the night, hidden deep in unmapped Java

GLOCESTER GHOUL

In the 1830s, sleepy Glocester, Rhode Island, was terrorised by a mysterious creature that lurked in the nearby swamps. While searching for treasure that they believed had been buried on the edge of town, Albert Hicks and his gang had a run-in with a chilling cryptid. Though it had the body of a ram, the creature's body, which was the size of a cow, was armoured with scales. Atop its head were enormous spiralled horns and fireballs were roaring from its fiery eyes and mouth.

Hicks, who was executed for piracy three decades later, was known as a teller of tall tales, but he wasn't the only person who reported a close shave with the Glocester Ghoul. Over the decades that followed, people experienced a foul stench and a feeling of dread before the beast emerged from its hiding place to terrorise them. The sightings made headlines but as soon as it appeared, the Glocester Ghoul was gone. With no appearances in more than 120 years, it seems that he may have tired of scaring the locals.

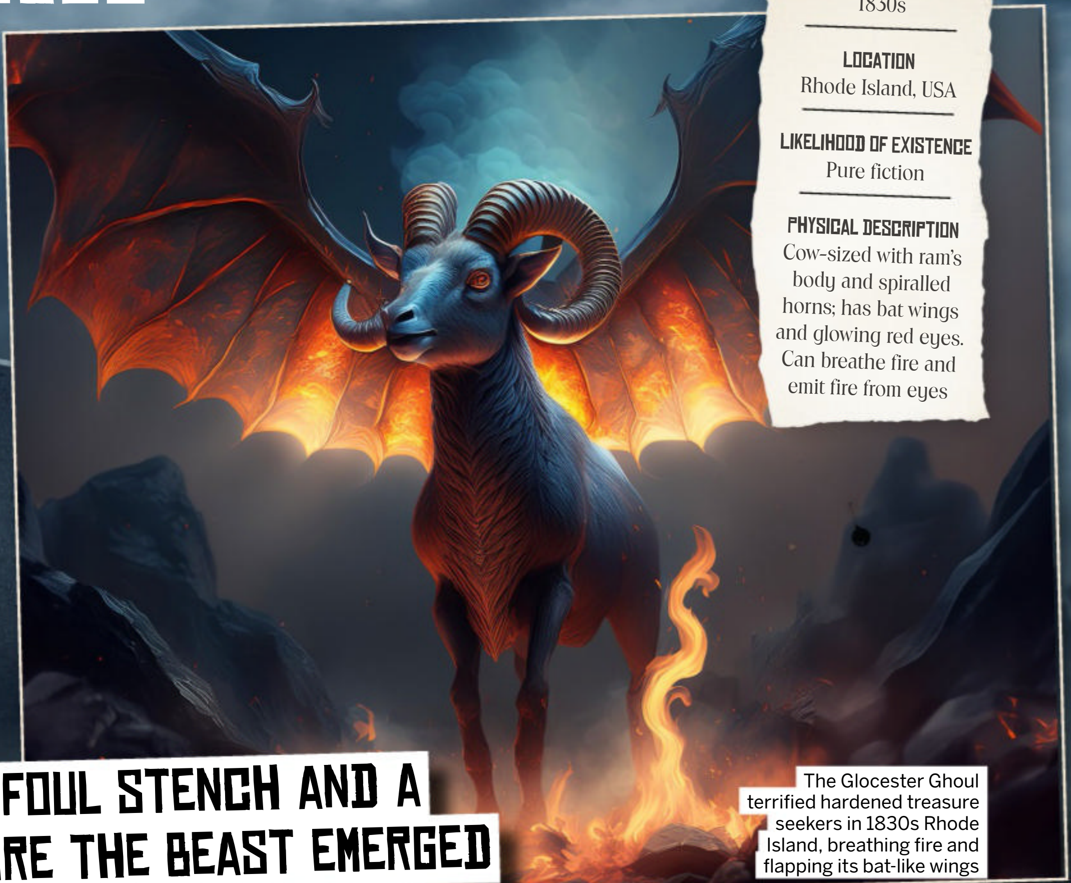
PEOPLE EXPERIENCED A FOUL STENCH AND A FEELING OF DREAD BEFORE THE BEAST EMERGED

FIRST SIGHTED
1830s

LOCATION
Rhode Island, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Pure fiction

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Cow-sized with ram's body and spiralled horns; has bat wings and glowing red eyes. Can breathe fire and emit fire from eyes


The Glocester Ghoul terrified hardened treasure seekers in 1830s Rhode Island, breathing fire and flapping its bat-like wings

EL CHUPACABRA

Lock up your animals! With a penchant for exsanguination, this terrifying American cryptid takes no prisoners

FIRST SIGHTED
1995

LOCATION
North, Central and South America

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
If you are in South America, it is a 0.9m to 1.2m (3-4ft), heavy-set reptilian with quills running down the spine. However, if you are in North America, it changes to a leather-skinned canine with pronounced eye sockets, fangs and claws

From the Spanish 'chupar', meaning 'to suck', and 'cabras', meaning 'goats', this popular cryptid is the stuff nightmares are made of. So named due to the fact the creature is said to suck the blood from its victims – goats and other livestock – El Chupacabra is not something you'd want to meet on a dark night.

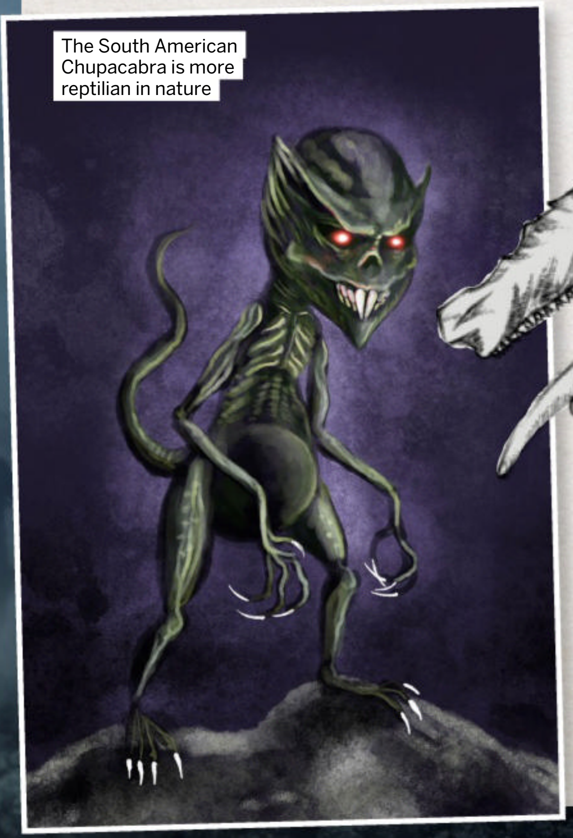
Almost equal to the Loch Ness Monster and Bigfoot in fame and popularity, the Puerto Rican Chupacabra entered the world of urban legends in 1995, when the first reported attack took place in March of that year. According to reports, eight dead sheep were discovered, each animal sporting three puncture marks on the chest. The most disturbing fact, however, was that the animals were said to have been entirely drained of blood.

Matters escalated quickly, and up to 150 animals were said to have been killed by the creature in Canóvanas, Puerto Rico. An eyewitness, Madelyne Tolentino, came forward in August 1995, adding further credence to the existence of this deadly creature. According to Tolentino, the culprit was two-legged, with dark eyes that reached the temples and spread around the side of the head. It also had long thin arms and legs with three fingers and toes, and two holes in place of a nose, with long spikes down its back. The creature was seen many times over the next five years, operating as far away as Peru, Brazil, Chile and Columbia. Descriptions of the appearance of the Chupacabra varied wildly across location and time: it was said by some to hop in the manner of a kangaroo.

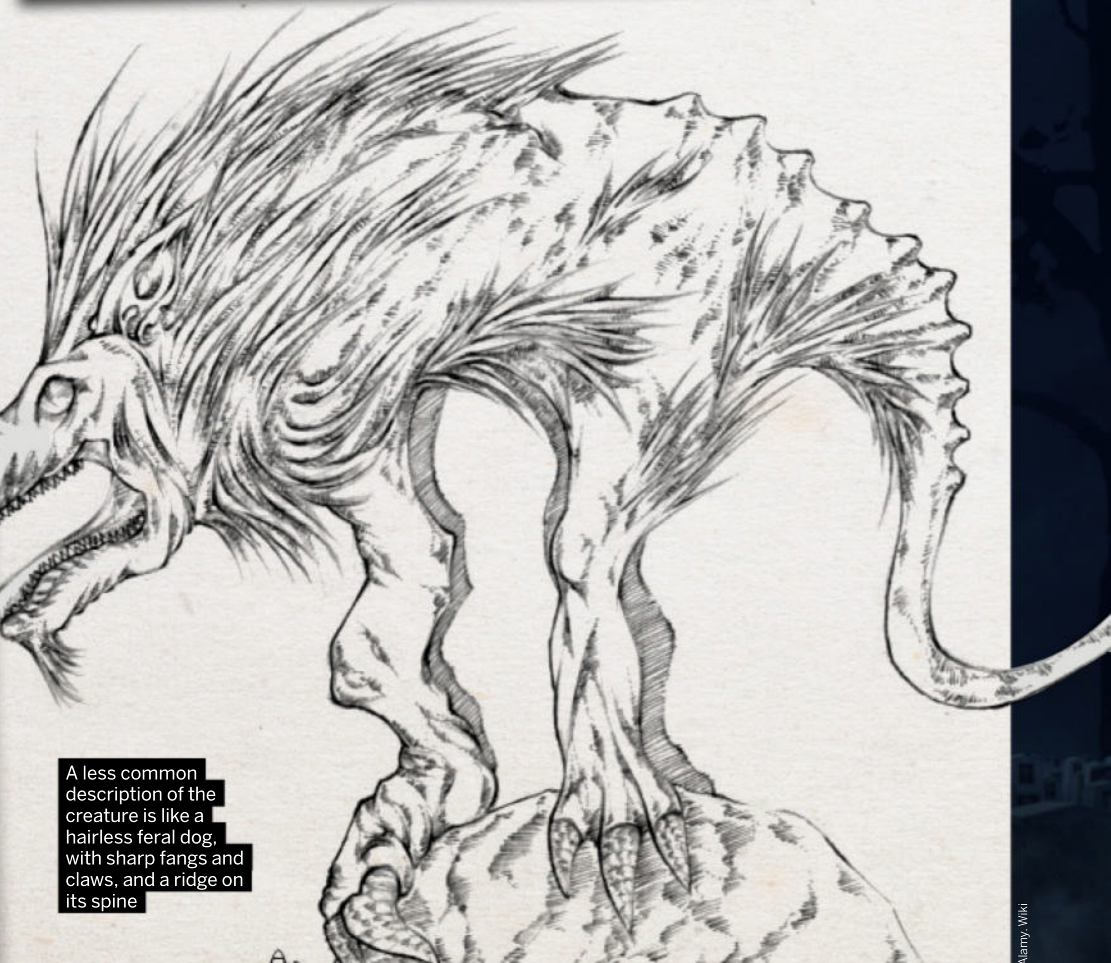
Sightings continued to occur, and over the years, Chupacabra have been blamed for the deaths of animals across America and as far away as Australia and India. Explanations for the baffling state of the victims include attack by a type of vampire bat, mange-ridden dogs, a demon, a dinosaur or a mutant kangaroo.

Does the Chupacabra exist? The evidence is hazy, due to the fact that the bloodless state of the original victims was never verified by the necessary necropsy that would have proved conclusively that the victims were, in fact, drained of blood. Also the evidence given by the first witness is on shaky grounds. A later researcher discovered that Tolentino's description mirrored that of Sil, the creature from *Species*, a horror film that premiered in the same year as the first supposed attack by El Chupacabra. Interest in the creature, however, remains unabated.

THE PUERTO RICAN CHUPACABRA ENTERED THE WORLD OF URBAN LEGENDS IN 1995



The South American Chupacabra is more reptilian in nature



A less common description of the creature is like a hairless feral dog, with sharp fangs and claws, and a ridge on its spine

Images © Alamy, Wiki

DOBHAR-CHÚ

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

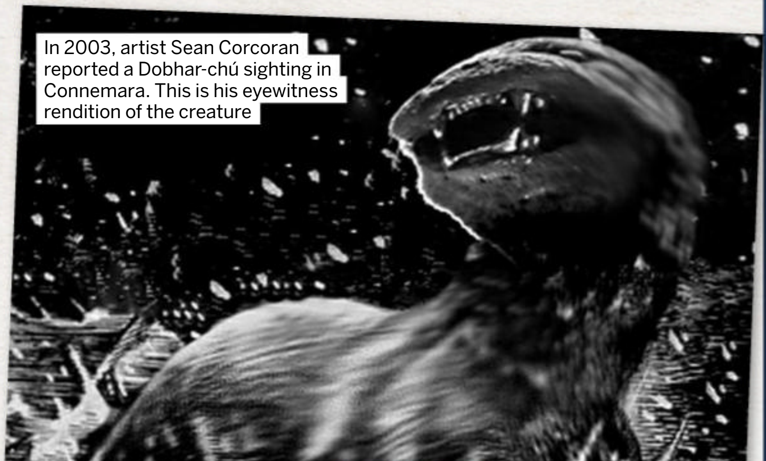
LOCATION
Glenade Lough, Ireland

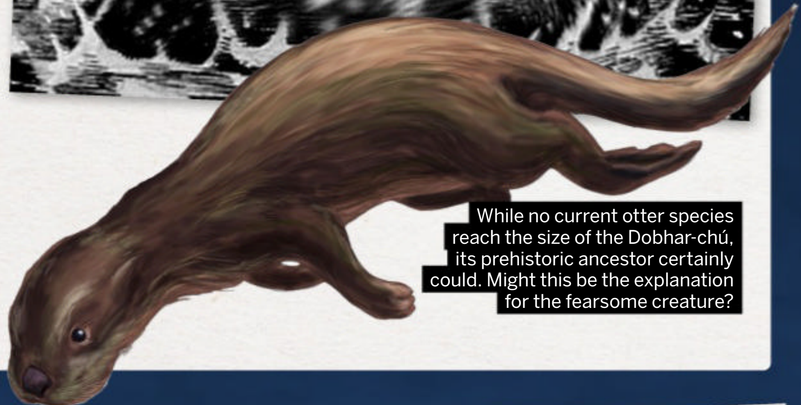
LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Otter-like with canine snout and sharp teeth; approx 3-4.6m (10-15ft) long. White pelt with black cross on back

Legend has it that in 1722, Grace Connolly was washing clothes in Glenade Lough when her husband heard her scream. When he rushed to her aid, he found his wife crushed beneath an enormous otter, that was the size of a large dog and had fearsome teeth in its snout. It was covered in white fur with a cross of black on its back. Though he dispatched the beast and its mate, this was not the last sighting of the Dobhar-chú.

Highly aggressive, Dobhar-chú hunt in at least pairs, seeking out humans and dogs. Modern sightings are rare, but Dobhar-chú have been reported sporadically. Though there are species of sea otter that can reach lengths of 1.8 metres (six feet), they are still shorter than the reported 3-4.5 metre (10-15 feet) of the Sobhar-chú. However the sea otter's prehistoric, supposedly long-extinct ancestor, Enhydriodon dikikae, was reportedly the size of a bear. Though this prehistoric creature was not known to inhabit Ireland, could the cryptid of Glenade Lough be a descendant?


In 2003, artist Sean Corcoran reported a Dobhar-chú sighting in Connemara. This is his eyewitness rendition of the creature


While no current otter species reach the size of the Dobhar-chú, its prehistoric ancestor certainly could. Might this be the explanation for the fearsome creature?

HODAG

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Wisconsin, USA

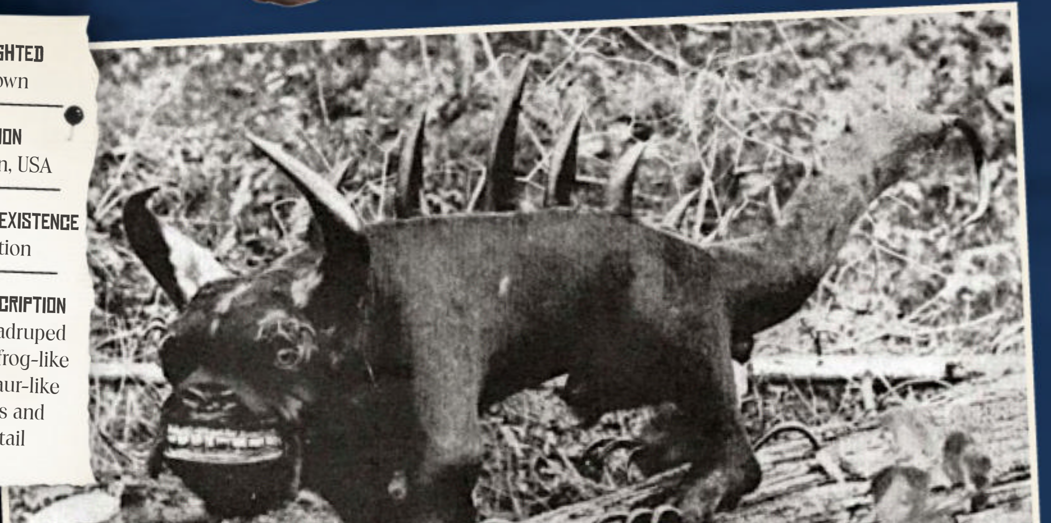
LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Pure fiction

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Ox-sized quadruped with horned frog-like head, dinosaur-like body, claws and speared tail

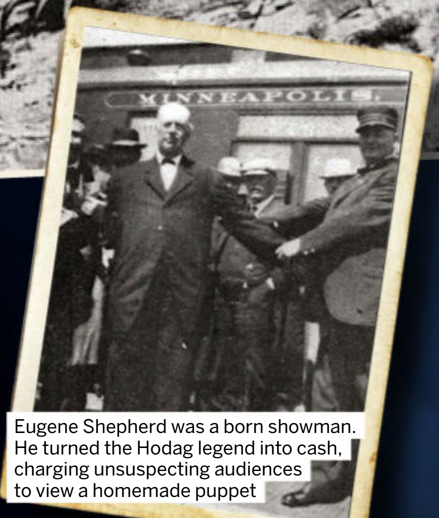
The Hodag legend was born out of the ashes of logging oxen who had been abused by their masters. Native to Rhinelander, Wisconsin, the vengeful spirit was often glimpsed by lumberjacks when working in remote locations.

Legend came to life in 1893 when Eugene Shepherd claimed to have killed a Hodag, dynamiting it into oblivion. Three years later Shepherd claimed that he had managed to capture a live Hodag, though it was far from the reported ox-sized legend, with fearsome horns and teeth, a dinosaur's body and a thick, strong, spear-tipped tail. Instead, Shepherd's Hodag was the size of a small dog, though it was muscular and sported bullish horns and spikes along its back.

Shepherd toured America, charging audiences to view the creature in a darkened tent. Shepherd explained that the aggressive Hodag was sedated for their safety, so barely moved. Only when scientists from the Smithsonian asked to study the beast did Shepherd admit that it was nothing but a money-spinning hoax. He had made the puppet Hodag from wood, leather and wires, but it was the audiences' imagination that really brought the beast to life.


The Hodag of legend was a good deal more fearsome than that supposedly captured by Eugene Shepherd in the 1890s

SHEPHERD'S HODAG WAS THE SIZE OF A SMALL DOG, THOUGH IT WAS MUSCULAR AND SPORTED HORNS



Eugene Shepherd was a born showman. He turned the Hodag legend into cash, charging unsuspecting audiences to view a homemade puppet

FIRST SIGHTED
1930s

LOCATION
Wyoming, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
None whatsoever

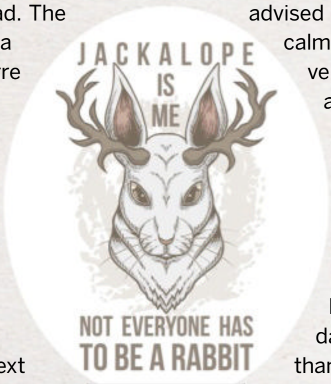
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
A large hare (or jackrabbit) fashioned with what looks like the horns of a miniature antelope protruding from its head

JACKALOPE

Meet the Jackalope – a cute-as-a-button creature that everyone knows is a hoax, but are more than happy to play along with anyway!

Ask anyone from North America what a Jackalope is and they will all be able to give you a clear description. It's a large jackrabbit with horns, similar to a miniature antelope, protruding from its head. The fact that everybody knows what a Jackalope looks like is truly bizarre since the creature doesn't exist and sadly, never has.

It all started in the 1930s in Wyoming when Douglas Herrick, a hunter, amateur taxidermist and all-round jokester, brought a dead hare home and set it down next to a pair of antlers. The image made him smile and so he spent the next few hours combining the two until the Jackalope was born. He sold the mounted chimera to the La Bonte Hotel for $10 and thought no more about it. However, the one-off joke quickly became the most famous thing to come out of the town and is now one of the most successful hoaxes of all time. As the folklore spread, details of its behaviour were added.



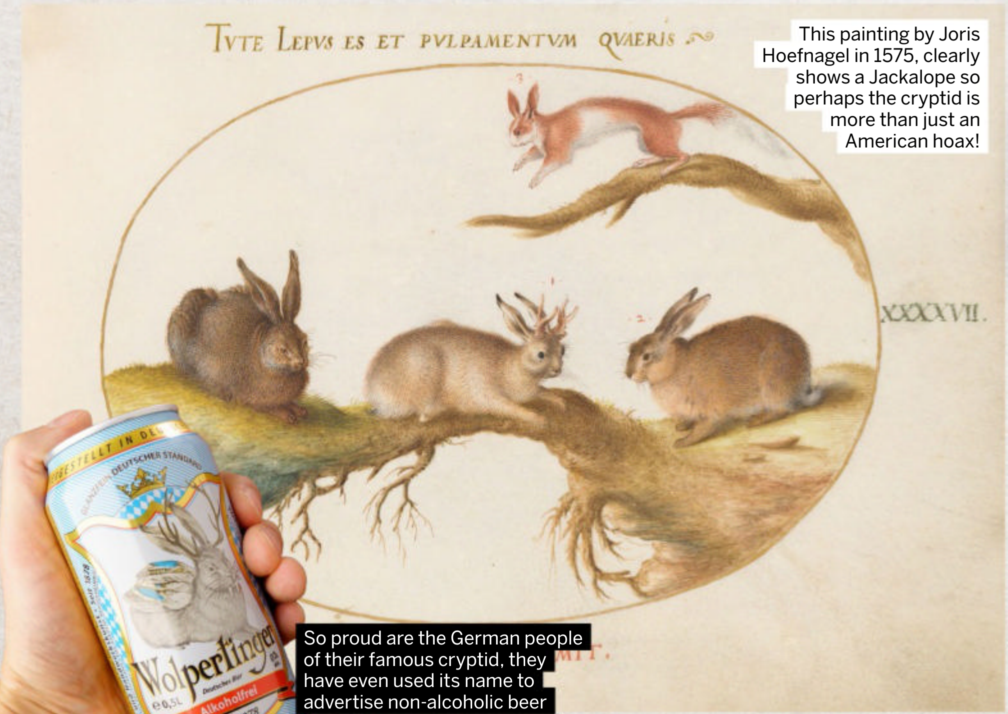
The image of the Jackalope has become a symbol of individuality across the planet

Tourists are warned not to approach a Jackalope should they come across one in the forests as they are both unpredictable in nature and extremely vicious. Lumberjacks wear protective shin guards when trekking through the undergrowth, as they are likely to be gored by the creature's sharp antlers. If cornered by an angry Jackalope, you are advised to offer it whiskey as this calms the beast down. It's also a very good reason to keep some alcohol on you at all times.

Beware strange voices in the forest as the Jackalope can mimic a human and is even known to sing when in a particularly good mood.

Rumours of this magical beast continue to the present day and the locals are more than happy to perpetuate this money-making cash cow. Local stores sell stuffed and mounted specimens, while corner shops offer Jackalope milk as a delicacy. Should you want to have a go at capturing your very own Jackalope, you can apply to the council for a special non-resident hunting licence, which can only be used on 31st June from sunrise to sunset!

Wonderful examples of taxidermy, Jackalopes can now be found all over the world. These handsome fellows come from New Mexico


TVTE LEPVS ES ET PVLPAMENTVM QVAERIS
XXXXVII.

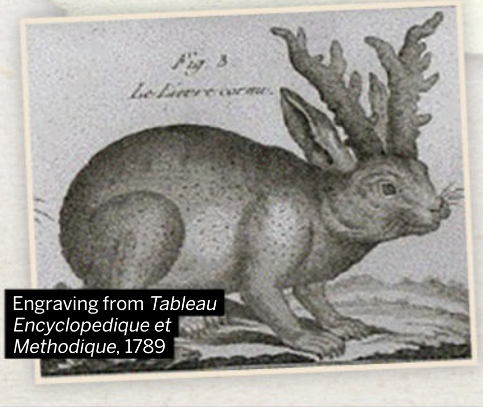
This painting by Joris Hoefnagel in 1575, clearly shows a Jackalope so perhaps the cryptid is more than just an American hoax!

Wolpertinger
Alkoholfrei
Seit 1878

So proud are the German people of their famous cryptid, they have even used its name to advertise non-alcoholic beer

IS THE TRUTH IN A VIRUS?

Some cryptozoologists have argued that there is such a thing as a Jackalope but sadly, the reason for its existence is tragic rather than magic. The Shope papilloma virus attacks all forms of leporids, including hares, causing keratinous tumours to grow on the infected head. These growths can resemble horns or antlers, perpetuating the myth of the Jackalope. The disease is also said to be at the heart of another cryptid, the German Wolpertinger. Like the Jackalope, the Wolpertinger is said to be a horned hybrid, but with a deer rather than an antelope.



Engraving from *Tableau Encyclopedique et Methodique*, 1789

Images © Alamy, Wiki

KASAI REX

In 1832, Swedish hunter John Johanson was travelling across the savannah of the Kasai Valley, stalking elephants. As he readied his gun, a creature burst from the underbrush and snatched up the elephants; Johanson shot it once before it darted back into cover. Minutes later, Johanson was confronted with the dinosaur-like creature again, as it tore a rhino limb from limb. The reddish creature, which sported black stripes, resembled a T-Rex, with an intimidating snout and razor teeth, its biped body of around four metres (13 feet) ending in a tail. It moved fast and with precision on strong legs.

Seasoned hunter or not, Johanson was terrified. Other hunters came to claim the beast's hide, but either fled for their lives or, in the case of Robert Henderson in 1950, were mysteriously killed in the attempt.

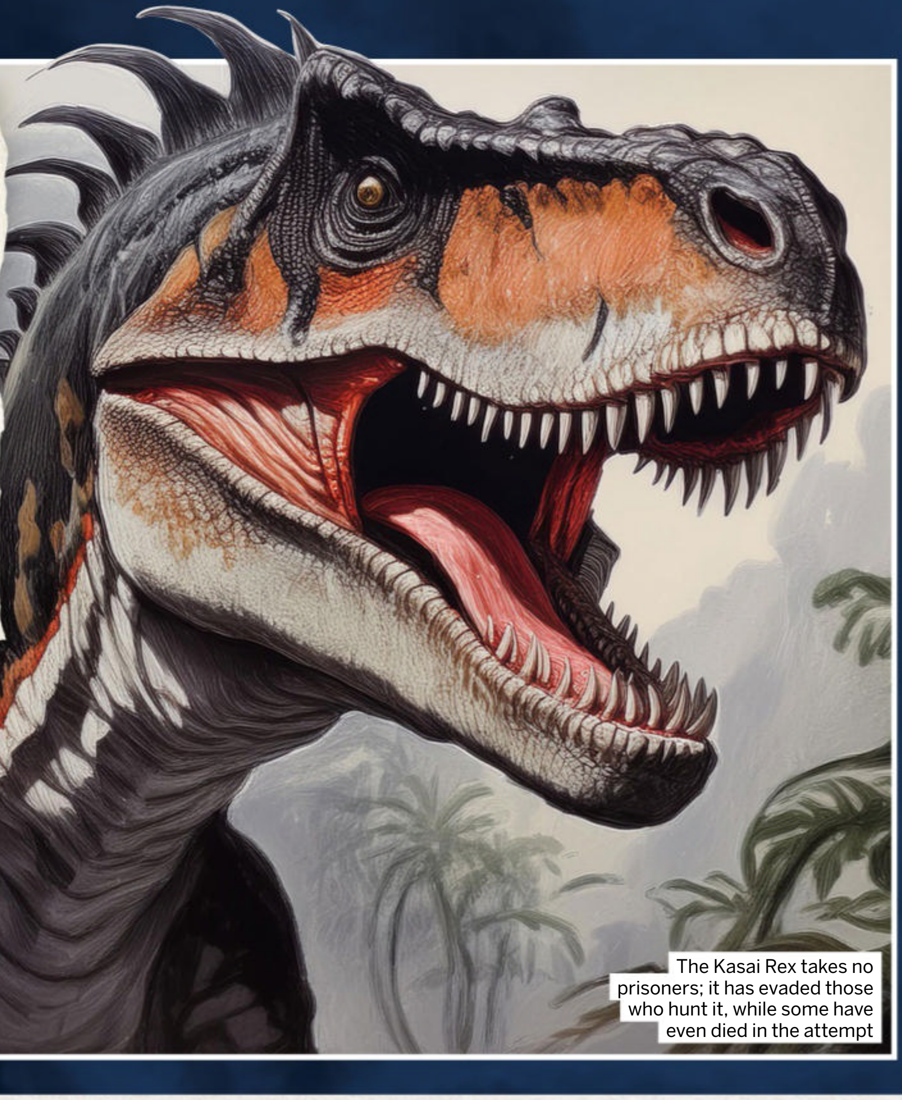
If the creature is real, then it is likely a theropod, related not to the T-Rex, which never lived in Africa, but to species that could once be found in the region. Though there are three alleged photographs of the Kasai Rex, all appear to show a creature that could be a large monitor lizard and have been dismissed as likely hoaxes.

FIRST SIGHTED
1932

LOCATION
Democratic Republic of Congo, Central Africa

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
A tyrannosaurus-like dinosaur, measuring roughly four metres (13 feet) in length; reddish skin with black stripes, scary snout and razor-sharp teeth



The Kasai Rex takes no prisoners; it has evaded those who hunt it, while some have even died in the attempt

THE AFRICAN WATER ELEPHANT

FIRST SIGHTED
1898

LOCATION
Democratic Republic of Congo, Central Africa

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's Still Out

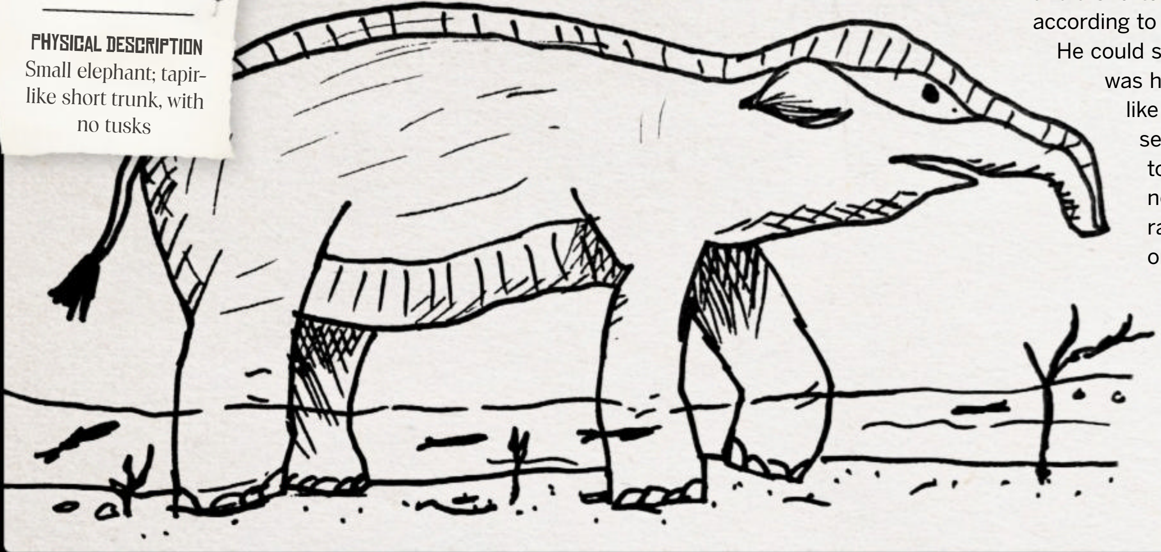
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Small elephant; tapir-like short trunk, with no tusks

With elephant, tapir and hippopotamus-like features, the Water Elephant is a tantalising believable cryptid that keeps itself to itself

Sightings of the Ndgoko na Maiji, aka Water Elephant, were reported by hunter Fitzwilliam Thomas Pollock in 1898, apparently confirming rumours that had been circulating for years. However, more concrete reports came in in 1907 by Charles Le Petit of the Paris Natural History Museum, who witnessed an elephant-like creature that could remain fully submerged in freshwater for long periods of time. The creature had smaller ears and a shorter trunk than an elephant which, according to Le Petit, was like that of a tapir.

He could see no tusks and the animal's hide was hairless and shiny, like a hippo. Also like a hippo, the tracks showed four separate toes. Le Petit's local guides told him that the creature was nocturnal and ate grasses. Though rarely sighted, it was dangerous only when it surfaced and capsized canoes and boats.

This cryptic might well be an undocumented species of tapir, which are not usually found in Africa. Others have suggested, however, that the Water Elephant was merely a pygmy elephant, which was wrongly documented.



MONGOLIAN DEATH WORM

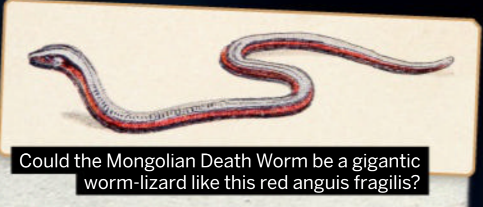
OR OLGOI-KHORKHOI

Tales of this bendy beast have circulated for hundreds of years, but it continues to evade those desperately searching for it

Oral folklore of the Death Worm goes back generations among the Mongolian people and, despite the fact that nobody has seen it and lived to tell the tale, the belief of its existence continues to this very day. The Western world was not introduced to the fearsome cryptid until 1926 when palaeontologist, Roy Chapman Andrews, published his book, *On The Trail Of Ancient Man*. In it he described the creature as told to him by state officials, who warned him of the creature that lurked beneath the sands of the Gobi Desert, and asked him to try and capture a specimen to prove its existence. The explorer was only too willing to give it a go.

Locals called it Olgoi-Khorkhoi, meaning 'intestine worm', after its long sausage-like shape. The colour, he was reliably informed, was a deep crimson red, or pale brown… or possibly grey. Officials also warned him of the worm's propensity to spit acidic venom at its victim, at the very least blinding its prey if not killing it outright with its corrosive saliva. Goggles were duly handed out to protect the eyes. Some time later, and with no specimens, live or otherwise, Andrews had to admit defeat. However, this has not deterred hundreds of cryptozoologists from around the world following in his footsteps. Expeditions to locate the beast are regularly undertaken, which is said to stay beneath the sand, only rearing its head in order to attack. Some use 'thumpers' to create rhythmic pounding to bring the worm to the surface. Others have buried explosives, but to no avail. Monster-hunters have wrangled with the notion that it can send out a bolt of electricity when threatened but, of all its characteristics, this seems the most far-fetched.

So, is the Death Worm a genuine as yet unknown sand dweller, or is it simply a terrifying urban legend?



Could the Mongolian Death Worm be a gigantic worm-lizard like this red anguis fragilis?

SO WHAT COULD IT BE?

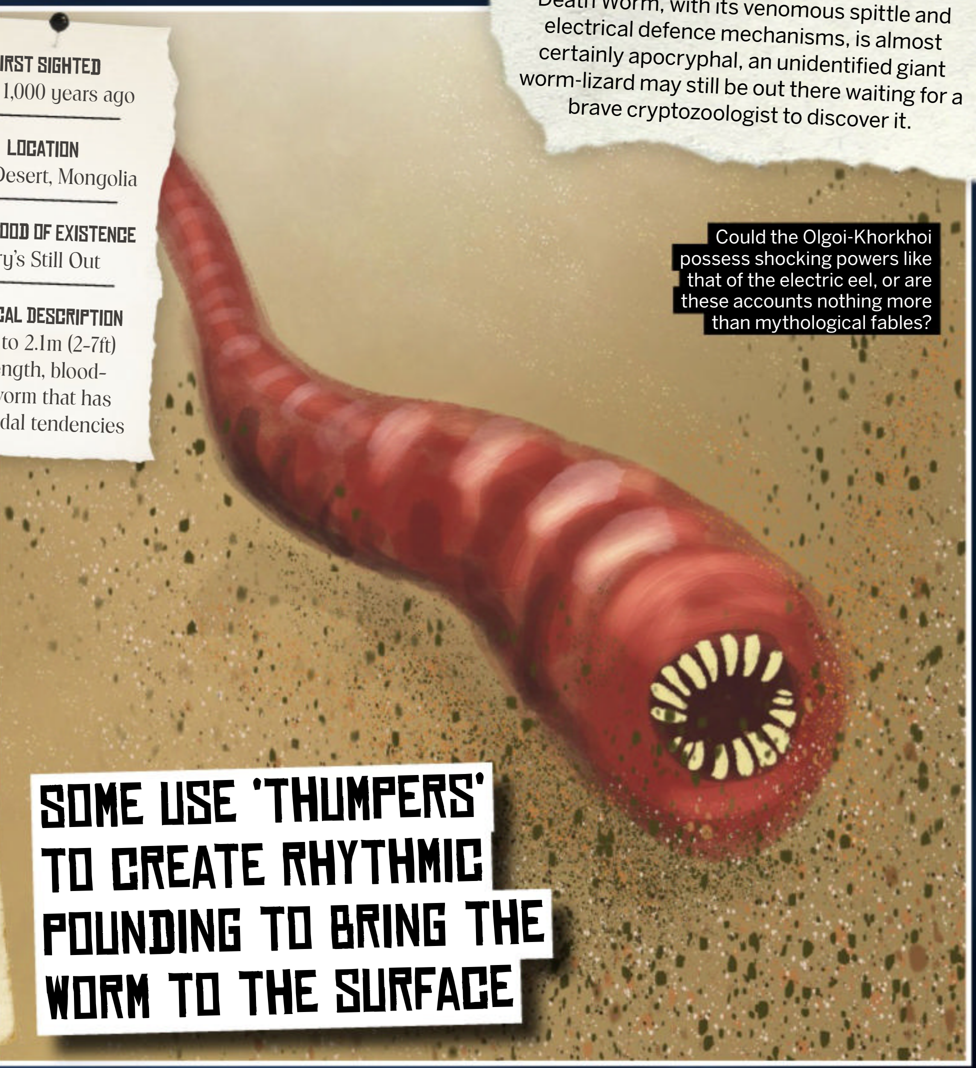
While experts are convinced the creature is not an actual worm, since they could not live in such a hot climate, some believe it could be a new species of amphisbaenia. These carnivorous, legless worm-lizards burrow beneath the sand using their shovel-shaped heads. They are able to rip chunks of flesh from their prey using powerful teeth and can live in very hot conditions. So, although the terrifying behaviour of the Mongolian Death Worm, with its venomous spittle and electrical defence mechanisms, is almost certainly apocryphal, an unidentified giant worm-lizard may still be out there waiting for a brave cryptozoologist to discover it.

FIRST SIGHTED
Over 1,000 years ago

LOCATION
Gobi Desert, Mongolia

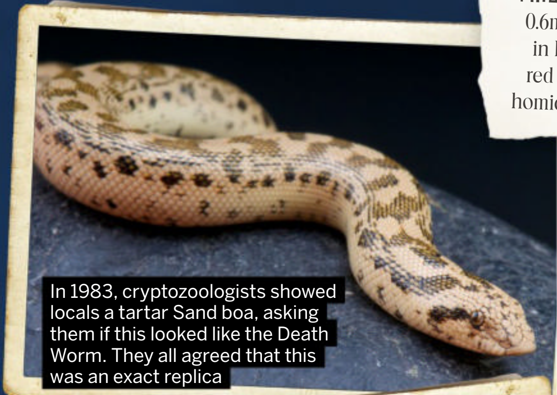
LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's Still Out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
0.6m to 2.1m (2-7ft) in length, blood-red worm that has homicidal tendencies

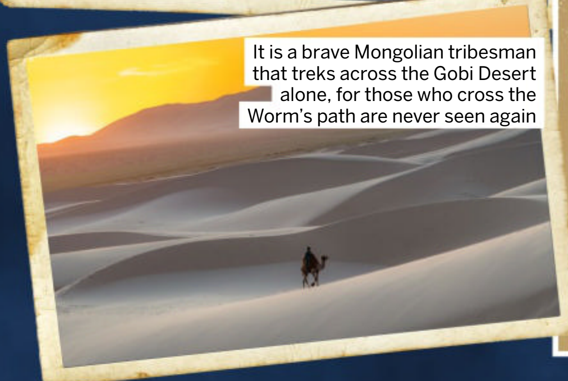


Could the Olgoi-Khorkhoi possess shocking powers like that of the electric eel, or are these accounts nothing more than mythological fables?

SOME USE 'THUMPERS' TO CREATE RHYTHMIC POUNDING TO BRING THE WORM TO THE SURFACE



In 1983, cryptozoologists showed locals a tartar Sand boa, asking them if this looked like the Death Worm. They all agreed that this was an exact replica



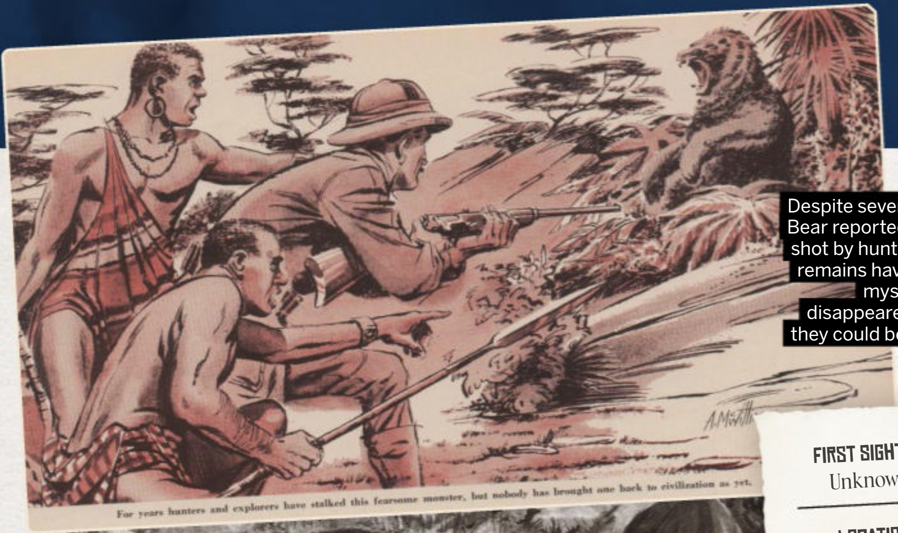
It is a brave Mongolian tribesman that treks across the Gobi Desert alone, for those who cross the Worm's path are never seen again

Images © Getty images, Alamy, Wiki, Adobe Firefly AI

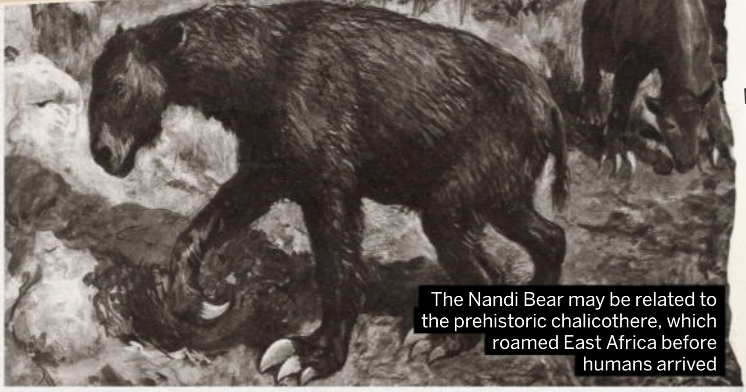
NANDI BEAR

In the folklore of East Africa, the Nandi Bear is a ferocious, carnivorous cryptid. Resembling a cross between a hyena and a baboon, the Nandi Bear stands at 1.3 metres (4.5 feet) at its reddish-furred shoulder, which slopes down to its tail. Its bear-like snout contains ferocious teeth capable of a powerful bite. Though spoken of in tribal lore, it was first sighted by explorers in 1905 and in the decade that followed, was witnessed by railway workers crossing the Magadi Line in British East Africa. A Nandi Bear was even reported to have been killed in the area and there were violent attacks on cattle and villagers, resulting in casualties.

Despite several Nandi Bears supposedly being shot, none of their remains has been verified and no photographs exist, though sketches have been made of their tracks. It has been suggested that they may actually be a extinct chalicothere, the bones of which have been discovered in Uganda. Intriguingly, it shares several characteristics with the Malawi Terror Beast, another cryptid of East Africa.


For years hunters and explorers have stalked this fearsome monster, but nobody has brought one back to civilization as yet.

Despite several Nandi Bear reportedly being shot by hunters, their remains have always mysteriously disappeared before they could be verified



The Nandi Bear may be related to the prehistoric chalicothere, which roamed East Africa before humans arrived

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Kenya, East Africa

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

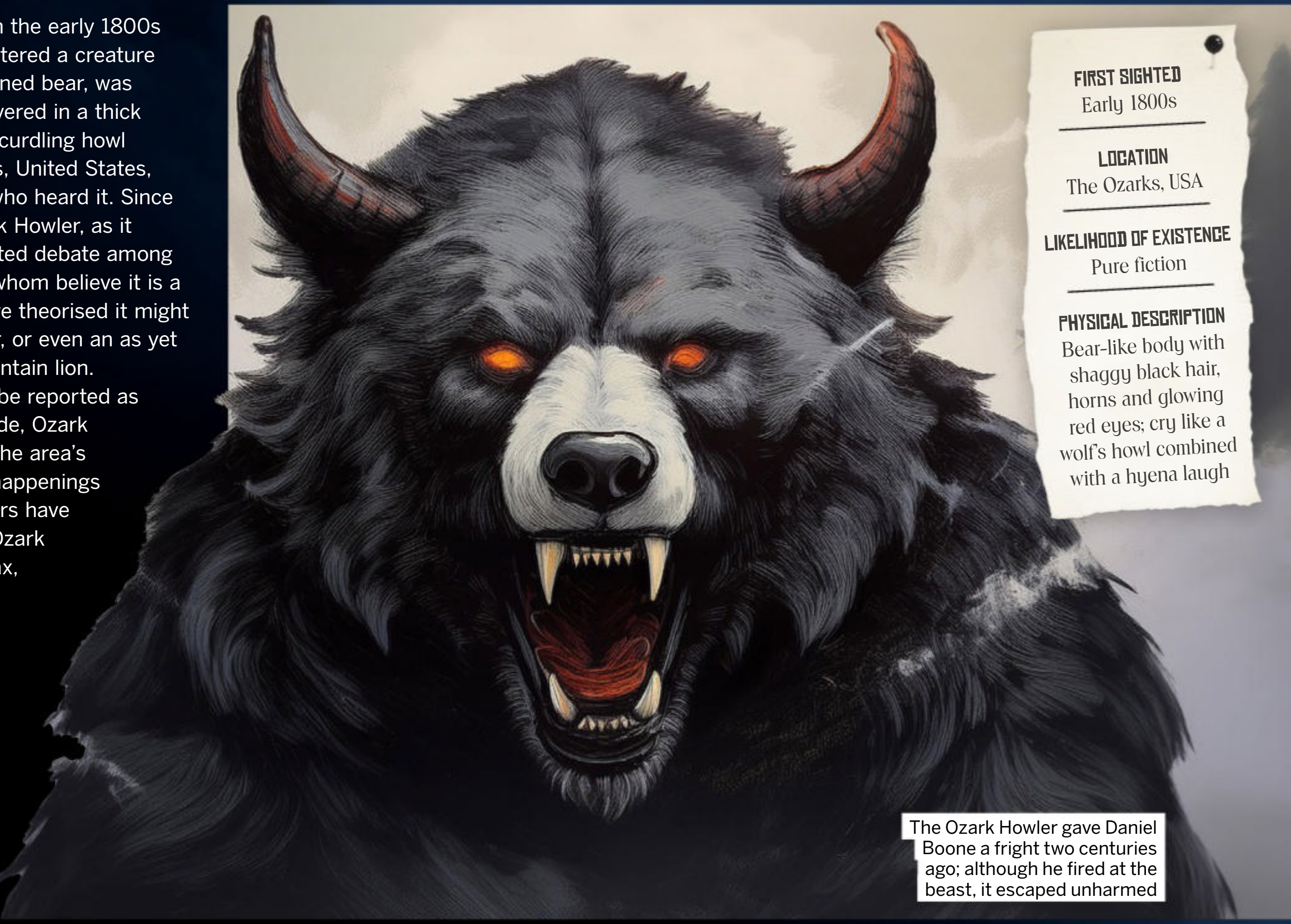
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Hyena-like carnivore; 1.3m (4.5ft), reddish fur, razor teeth in bear-like snout and has the ability to scalp

THE OZARK HOWLER

According to legend, in the early 1800s Daniel Boone encountered a creature that looked like a horned bear, was fearsome and huge and covered in a thick coat of black hair. Its bloodcurdling howl split the night in the Ozarks, United States, striking fear into all those who heard it. Since that first sighting, the Ozark Howler, as it came to be called. has excited debate among cryptozoologists, some of whom believe it is a big cat, while biologists have theorised it might be a misidentified wild boar, or even an as yet undiscovered breed of mountain lion.

As sightings continue to be reported as recently as in the last decade, Ozark historians have pointed to the area's rich history of mysterious happenings and folklore. Yet some others have dared to suggest that the Ozark Howler is nothing but a hoax, dreamed up by a student from the University of Arkansas who bombarded cryptozoologists with requests for information about the creature.

Yet as believers have pointed out, if this is indeed the case, how could Boone have encountered the creature some 200 years earlier?



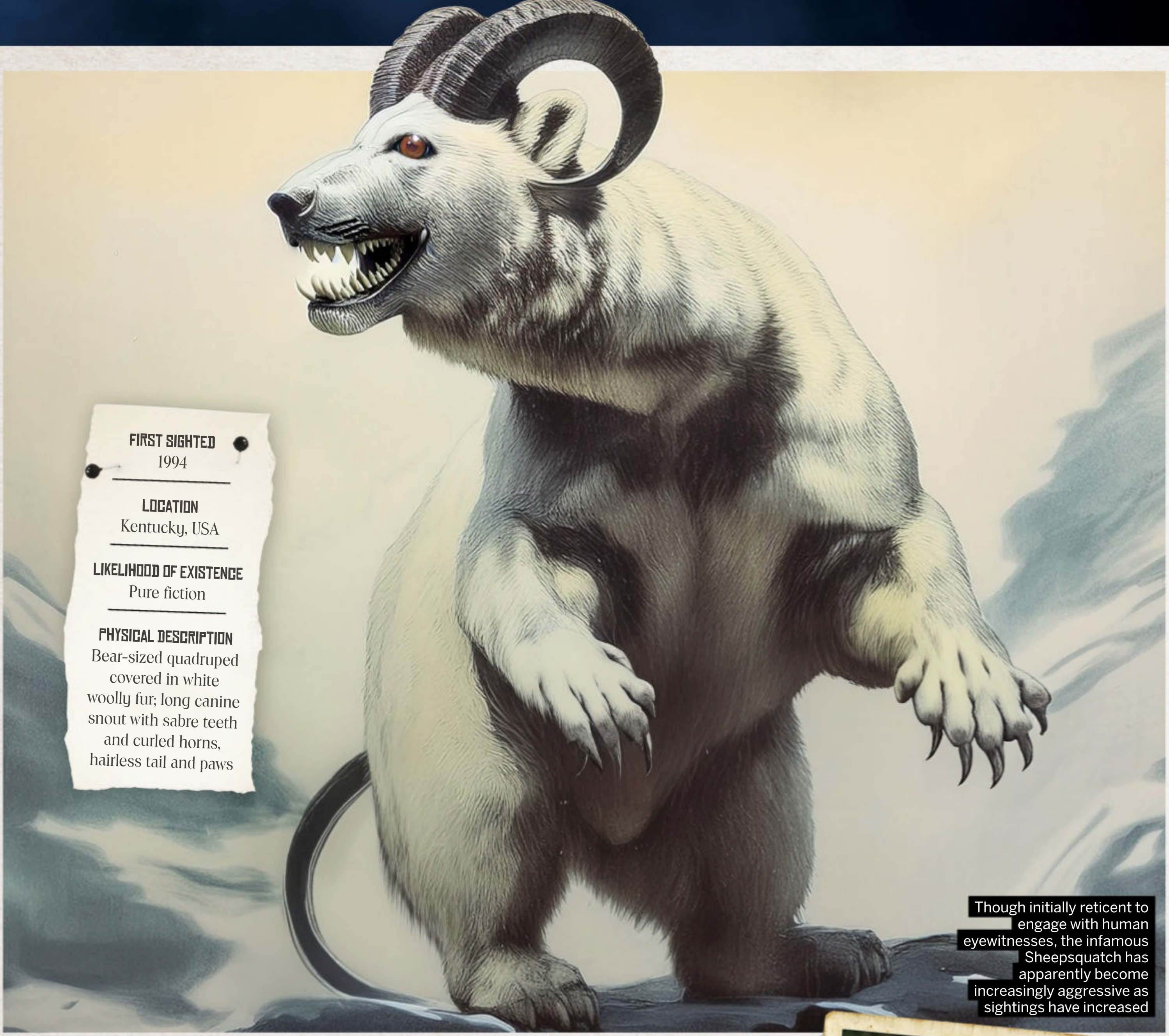
The Ozark Howler gave Daniel Boone a fright two centuries ago; although he fired at the beast, it escaped unharmed

FIRST SIGHTED
Early 1800s

LOCATION
The Ozarks, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Pure fiction

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Bear-like body with shaggy black hair, horns and glowing red eyes; cry like a wolf's howl combined with a hyena laugh



FIRST SIGHTED
1994

LOCATION
Kentucky, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Pure fiction

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Bear-sized quadruped covered in white woolly fur; long canine snout with sabre teeth and curled horns, hairless tail and paws

Though initially reticent to engage with human eyewitnesses, the infamous Sheepsquatch has apparently become increasingly aggressive as sightings have increased

SHEEPSQUATCH

If you are wandering around Kentucky and catch a whiff of sulpher in the air, you might be close to a Sheepsquatch

In 1994, a former member of the US Navy was hiking in Boone County, Kentucky, when he smelled sulphur in the air and witnessed an odd creature drinking from a creek. Huge and muscled and covered in white fur, it looked like a monstrous sheep, which was the size and build of a bear. Curled horns spiralled from its head and though it was covered in sheep-like wool, its forelimbs ended in paws and its long tail was hairless. Not too long afterwards, the same creature was spotted by two children in the same forest; at the sight of them it rose to its hind legs and fled.

After that, Sheepsquatch's legend grew, with witnesses reporting attacks on vehicles and even, in 2015, an attempted attack on a group of campers. Sheeqsquatch pursued them across a deep river and was only scared away by a strange shriek that sounded in the darkness. To date, this is the last reported sighting; if Sheepsquatch is still roaming Kentucky, he isn't in any hurry to let us know.

Rams can be scary enough – imagine seeing one as big as a bear!

Images © Alamy, Wiki, Adobe Firefly.

THE SNALLYGASTER

FIRST SIGHTED
1903

LOCATION
Frederick County, Maryland, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

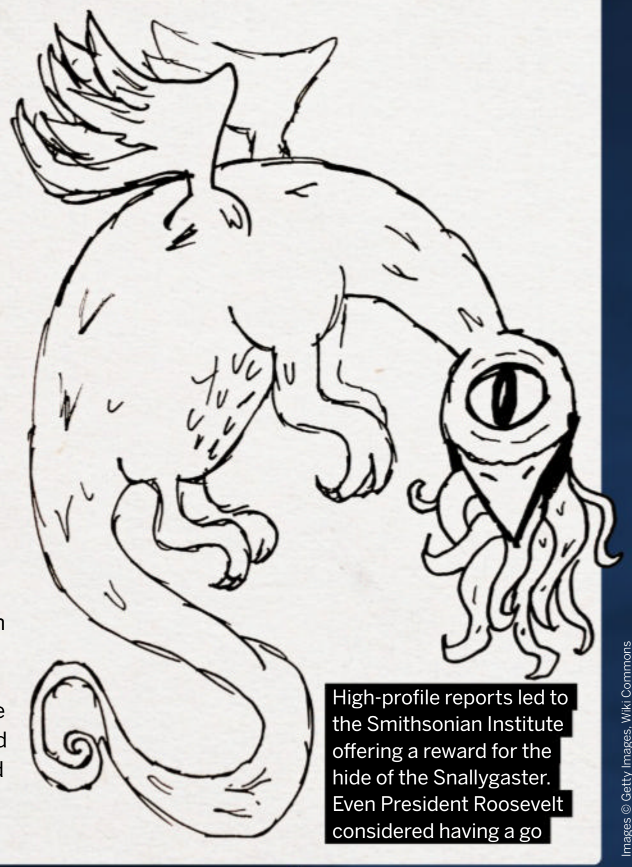
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
A large winged half-bird, half-reptile creature with a long, pointed beak, large claws and one central eye

The Snallygaster is a bird-like cryptid with a foul stench and screeching call, associated with the German immigrant communities of Frederick County, Maryland

The Snallygaster is a strange, composite cryptid, whose description varies with who tells the tale. Half-bird, half-reptile and sometimes described as having tentacles, the Snallygaster is a little-known cryptid with a fearsome beak. After accounts of a Jersey Devil rampage in 1909, a few weeks later a Maryland newspaper reported that a man had been attacked by a strange creature while walking home. The beast had swooped down, dragged the man up a hill, slit his throat with its beak, drained his blood and dumped his body into a ravine. This gruesome story was met with a flurry of copycat tales, where in one instance, the Snallygaster was the transformed spirit of a Civil War soldier.

The story of the Snallygaster began to diminish shortly after its discovery. The same newspaper that broke the story, closed its reportage with a claim that scientists had uncovered the Snallygaster's lair, after which it fled in the direction of Virginia. In 1932, he returned only for it to be reported just weeks later that the famed creature had perished in a vat of moonshine. Reports of the Snallygaster periodically emerge across Maryland, but in no great way as to worry communities, with the name applied to UFO sightings, ghosts and even political candidates.

The name 'Snallygaster' is thought to derive from the German phrase 'schnelle geist' or 'quick ghost'. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Western Maryland saw substantial immigration from German communities, who brought their language, superstitions and folkloric beliefs with them. As German folklore contains many stories of dragons and wyverns, it's believed that the cryptid is a patchwork of imported fears and fantastical embellishments.



High-profile reports led to the Smithsonian Institute offering a reward for the hide of the Snallygaster. Even President Roosevelt considered having a go

Images © Getty Images, Wiki Commons

THE VAN METER VISITOR

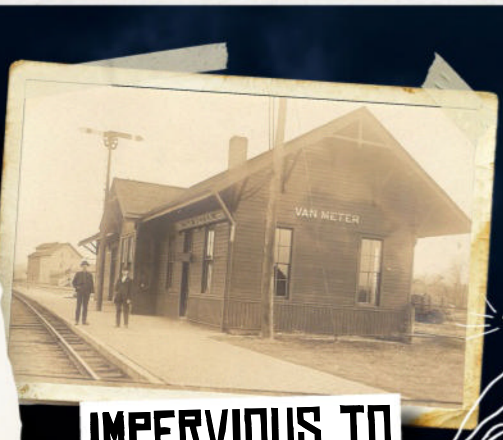
The Van Meter Visitor was described as a pterodactyl-type creature with a heavy stench that terrorised the inhabitants of the small city of Van Meter in Iowa in October 1903, where the monster indulged in a week-long rampage. Impervious to bullets, locals chased the 'Visitor' into a coal mine, from which another beast appeared. The townsfolk continued to open fire, and the beasts fled into the darkness of the mine.

FIRST SIGHTED
1903

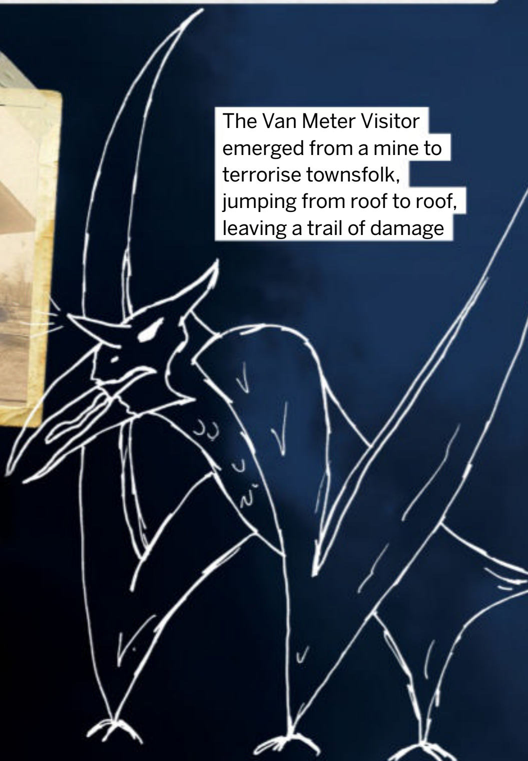
LOCATION
Iowa, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Pure Fiction

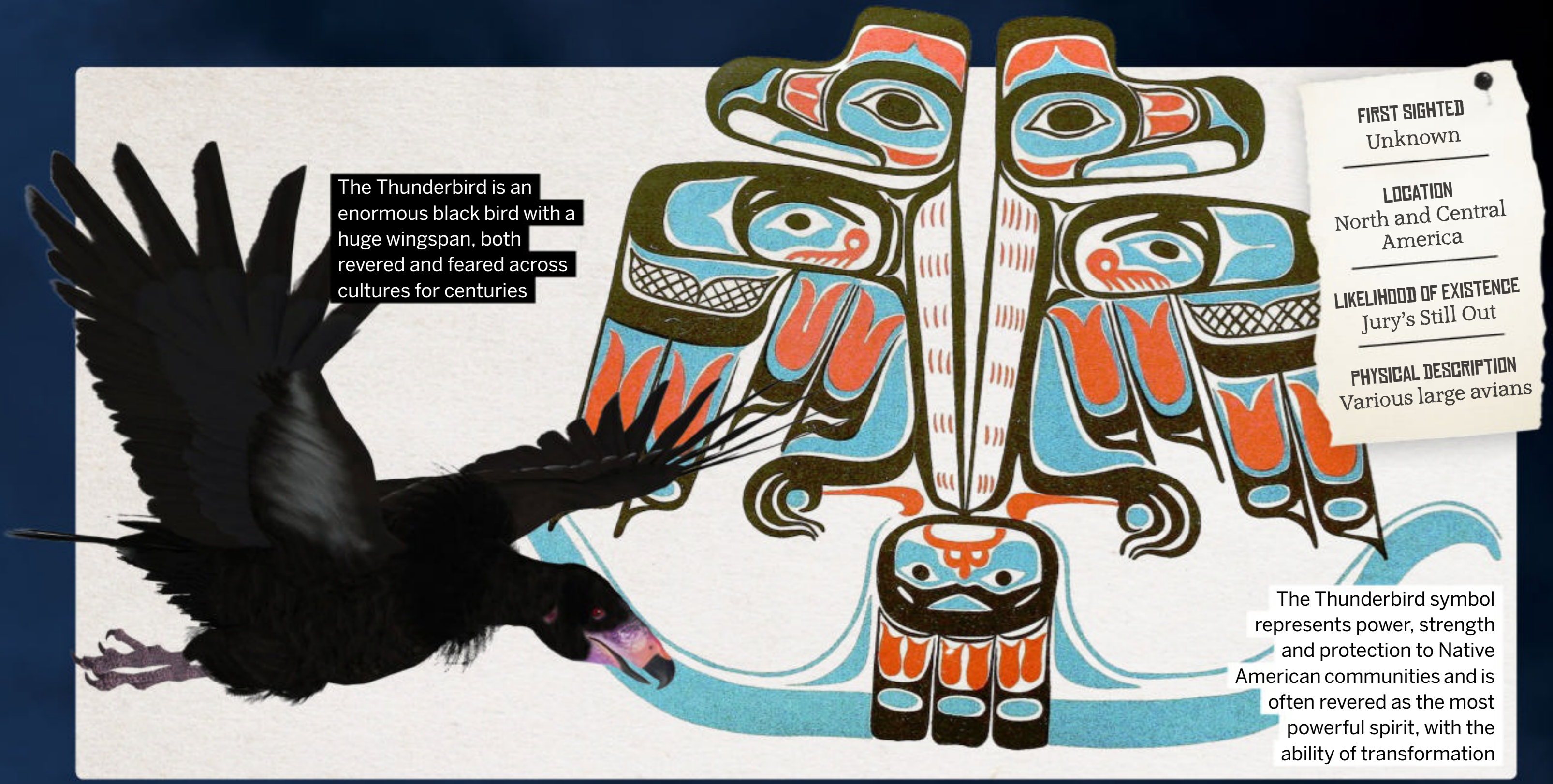
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
A winged creature with large bat wings, capable of projecting bright beams of light from its forehead.



IMPERVIOUS TO BULLETS, LOCALS CHASED THE 'VISITOR' INTO A COAL MINE



The Van Meter Visitor emerged from a mine to terrorise townsfolk, jumping from roof to roof, leaving a trail of damage



The Thunderbird is an enormous black bird with a huge wingspan, both revered and feared across cultures for centuries

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
North and Central America

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's Still Out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Various large avians

The Thunderbird symbol represents power, strength and protection to Native American communities and is often revered as the most powerful spirit, with the ability of transformation

THE THUNDERBIRD

Thunderbird’ is a name given to many large bird-like cryptids, sighted across the Americas. While some Indigenous American communities revere them, others fear attacks

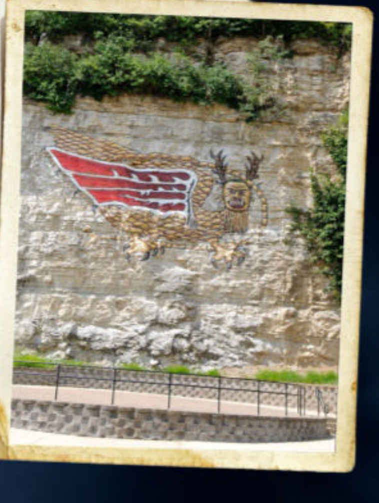
The Thunderbird is an enormous bird-like cryptid that appears in both Northern and Central American mythology, with similar creatures appearing in many incarnations within Native American stories. The origins of Thunderbirds are believed to lie in First Nation communities who developed myths and legends relating to large birds of prey. The most prominent of these myths is based around huge, magical birds whose wings were so powerful, they could beat them to create strong wings and thunder. Some birds were said to produce lightning from their eyes and that the water falling from their backs accounted for periods of rain.

Fossils of extinct animals, such as flying pterosaur dinosaurs and the Teratornithidae group of large birds, are also thought to account for early Thunderbird beliefs. The Teratornithidae family of predatory birds included some of the largest avians ever to exist, including Argentavis magnificens, whose wingspan is estimated to measure six metres (20 feet) or more. Subsequently, many fossils of large bird-type animals are nicknamed ‘Thunderbirds’ upon discovery.

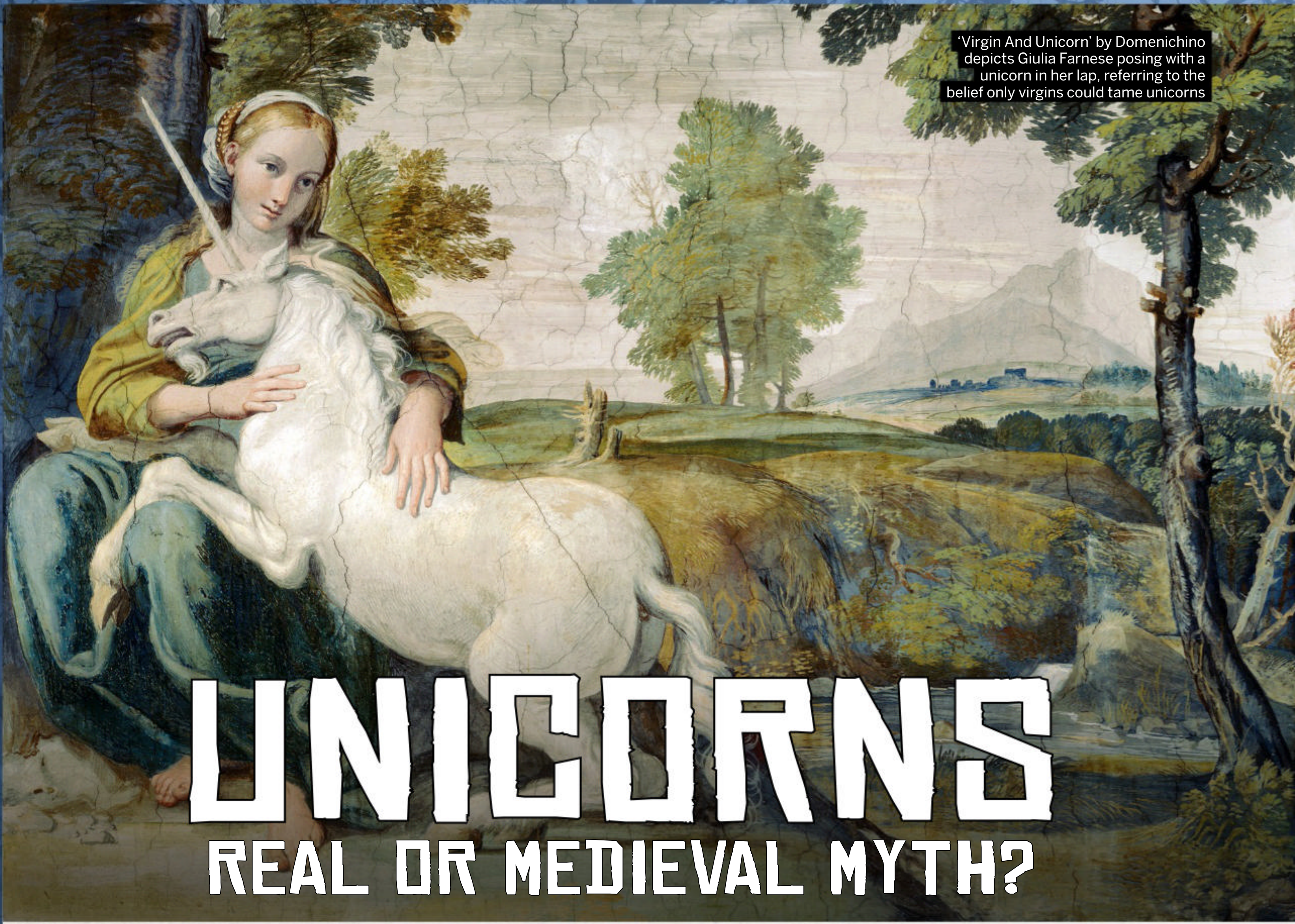
There have been countless reports of Thunderbird encounters across history, with many in recent years making for unsettling reading. In 1971, when driving at 2am in Mansfield, Massachusetts, Police Sergeant Thomas Downy witnessed an enormous bird with an 2.4-3.6-metre (eight-12-foot) wingspan flying overhead. Downy reported that the bird had a pointed beak and piercing eyes, and flew straight up and into a swamp area, before disappearing. Once again, in 1995, a Thunderbird was sighted in Massachusetts when a man driving over a hill believed a glider was flying overhead. When it approached his vehicle, he realised that it was not an aircraft, but an enormous bird. In 1977, Thunderbirds made headlines across America as a brutal attack was reported in Illinois. Ten-year-old Martin Lowe was playing outside when two large birds swooped down and attacked him, carrying him away until his mother came to the rescue. Several witnesses described the birds as having a 1.3 metre (4.5 foot) black body, a hooked beak, claws and white-ringed necks. More recently, in North Dakota in 2009, an Air Force security officer claimed to have encountered a Thunderbird when on patrol at night. At first, he believed a hang glider to be passing overhead, before realising that it was a huge bird with a six-metre (20-foot) wingspan.

THE PIASA MURAL

The Piasa Mural is a mural painted on cliffsides of the Mississippi River by Native Americans. The mural depicts a ‘Piasa Bird’ from Native American mythology; a large, horned bird with a fearsome face, scaly body and fish’s tail. The original mural was destroyed by a quarry company in the 1870s, but another was painted in the 20th century, using Victorian sketches as a basis for the replica.



The original Piasa Memorial predated the arrival of any European explorers and may have dated as far back as 900CE



'Virgin And Unicorn' by Domenichino depicts Giulia Farnese posing with a unicorn in her lap, referring to the belief only virgins could tame unicorns

UNICORNS

REAL OR MEDIEVAL MYTH?

In contemporary fantasy, unicorns are pure, noble animals who save the hero in their darkest hour. Yet in earlier times, people believed unicorns were real

FIRST SIGHTED
c.398 BCE

LOCATION
India, Persia, Europe

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Pure white horse, with a single horn on the forehead

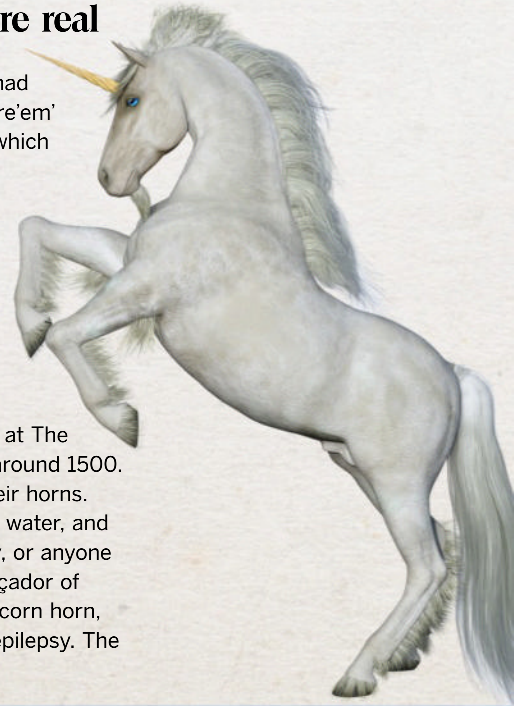
In c.398 BCE, Greek physician Ctesias wrote about Indian unicorns while based in Persia, after gathering tales from travellers. According to him, unicorns have a white body, a dark red head, dark blue eyes, and a white, crimson and black horn. No-one is quite sure whether Ctesias invented his description, whether he misinterpreted what he was told, or if the travellers made up the tales and he believed them.

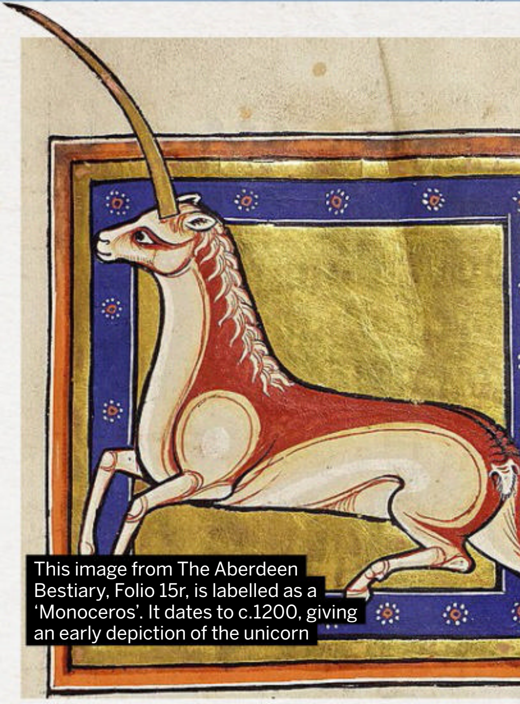
Elsewhere, Julius Caesar announced unicorns lived in forests on land occupied by the Celts. Pliny the Elder claimed the unicorn had the body of a horse, the head of a stag, the feet of an elephant, the tail of a boar, and a 0.9-metre (three-foot) long black horn. The feet and tail sound like an Indian rhinoceros.

Where the unicorn appears in the Bible, no-one knew what the original Hebrew word, 're'em', referred to. Some think it was a wild ox or an oryx. Because the Greeks had never seen one, they translated 're'em' to 'monokeros', or 'one-horned', which became 'unicornis' in Latin, and 'unicorn' in English.

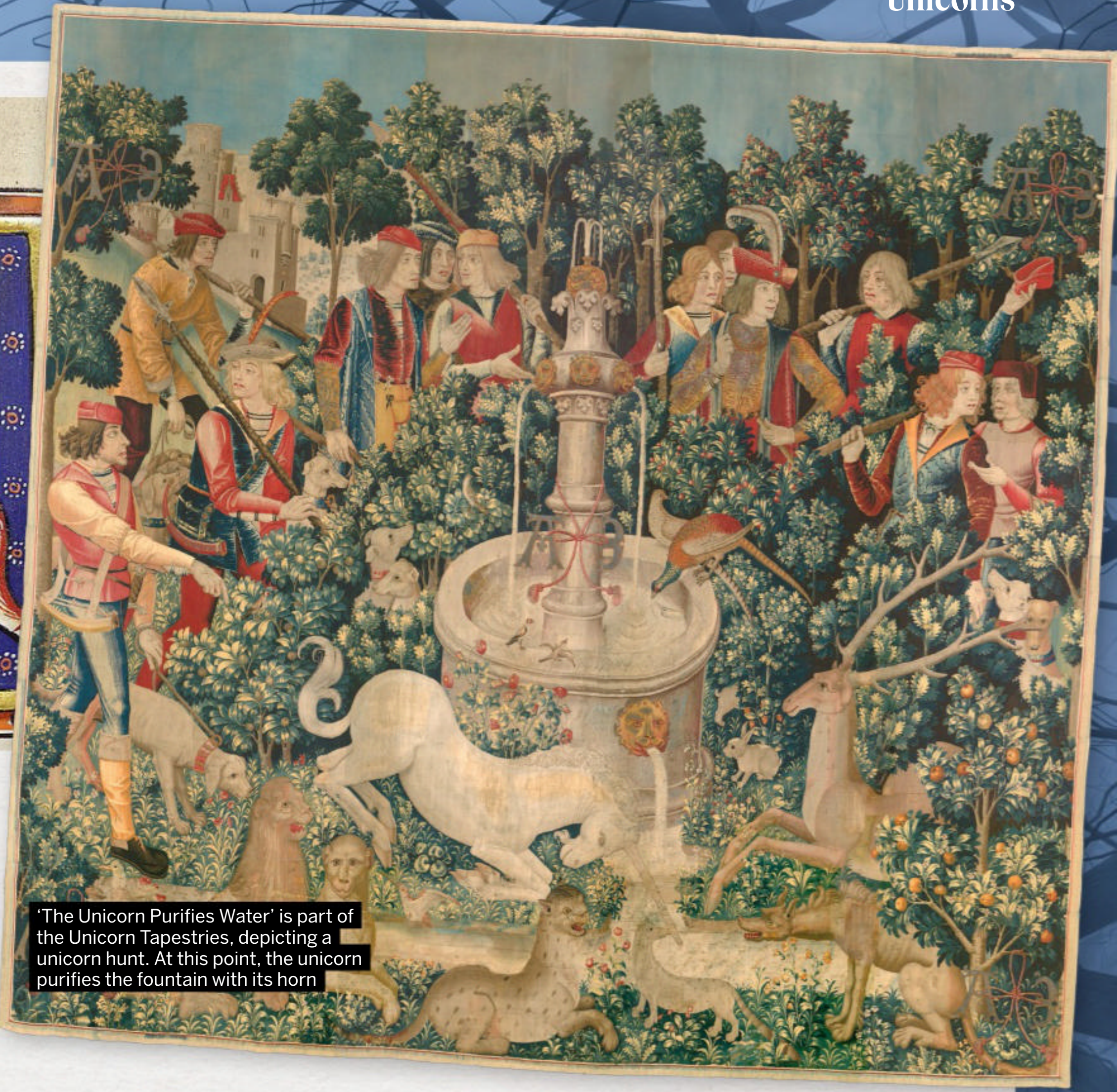
By the early Christian era, people believed hunters couldn't capture unicorns since they were so ferocious. Only virgin maidens could tame them so hunters could kill them. Such a hunt is depicted in the Unicorn Tapestries, now held at The Cloisters in New York, dating to around 1500.

Hunters prized unicorns for their horns. People believed the horn purified water, and this purified water cured epilepsy, or anyone who'd been poisoned. Joan el Caçador of Aragon desperately wanted a unicorn horn, perhaps since he suffered from epilepsy. The





This image from The Aberdeen Bestiary, Folio 15r, is labelled as a 'Monoceros'. It dates to c.1200, giving an early depiction of the unicorn



'The Unicorn Purifies Water' is part of the Unicorn Tapestries, depicting a unicorn hunt. At this point, the unicorn purifies the fountain with its horn

Count of Armangac sent him a piece of unicorn horn, which he decided to test. He poisoned two dogs and touched only one with the horn. The legend claimed the dog survived, while the dog not touched with the horn died.

Herbalist Nicholas Culpeper also claimed unicorn horn could cure urine retention, restore vitality, and induce labour. Such was the belief in the medicinal power of unicorn horn that the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries has two unicorns on its crest. The Neptune Fountain in Florence bears a unicorn, perhaps to show the water was safe to drink.

Apothecaries sold powdered unicorn horn, which was usually powdered narwhal horn, or powdered oryx horn. Who knows if the piece of horn sent to Joan el Caçador of Aragon actually came from an oryx? People paraded narwhal horns as unicorn horns since, without the attached animal, no-one knew any different. Without confirmed sightings, narwhal horns provided 'evidence' that unicorns existed.

Monarchs often adopted unicorns as their symbol thanks to their purity, strength, and power. The unicorn is even Scotland's national animal. Yet now they're depicted as somehow 'girly', with beauty companies launching holographic makeup lines featuring unicorn mascots, or brushes shaped like spiralled horns. Like the mermaid, this once ferocious animal is now firmly linked with children.

Sightings still occur, particularly in the YouTube age. In 2016, a cow in Uzbekistan grew a third horn from its forehead, leading some to dub it a unicorn (though it also had two bovine horns). People nicknamed a one-horned deer found in Florence in 2008 'Unicorn' after a genetic abnormality caused the single antler. Other videos claim to show 'real' unicorns, with blurry footage of grazing white horses, bearing the telltale single horn on their forehead. Given how easy it would be to fake a horse wearing a horn, it's hard to tell if the footage is genuine.

Yet horned and antlered animals are common, making the unicorn at least a plausible cryptid, if unlikely able to purify water with its horn. Maybe the unicorn existed but humans drove it to extinction for the horn. Perhaps similar cases to the Uzbekistan cow or Florentine deer occurred in the past, causing or contributing to the unicorn legend. Or maybe we should look at the similarity between the Monoceros and rhinoceros, which suggests unicorns are real, and we're just looking at the wrong animal...

'The Unicorn Purifies Water' is part of the Unicorn Tapestries, depicting a unicorn hunt. At this point, the unicorn purifies the fountain with its horn.

A unicorn runs through a picturesque forest. Unicorns are traditionally associated with woodland spaces, where they purify streams

Images © Getty Images, Wiki Commons

THE BIG DOGS: CANINE CRYPTIDS

From dire wolves to black dogs, crossing boundaries of geography, culture and years, canine cryptids stand in a category of their own

Dogs have been a staple of folklore for thousands of years, so it's really no surprise that they are also widespread and popular in the world of cryptid studies. They have been domesticated companions to humans for tens of thousands of years, but to the ancient Egyptians, dogs were gods, while in Greek myth, the three-headed dog Cerberus guarded the gates of the underworld. Our canine friends can also be found in Norse, Scandinavian and Hindu mythology among others, standing guard or keeping watch for millennia.

Whether revered as gods or feared as werewolves, canines have cemented their place in lore and in more recent centuries, in the reports of large dogs collected by cryptid-hunters. From Black Shuck to sightings of the extinct Japanese Wolf, there is something about them that fascinates. These widespread stories carry with them a hint of plausibility; a large dog or wolf doesn't seem so far-fetched and in the case of apparently extinct animals returning, there is even a kernal of hope – the possibility that something thought lost is still out there.

In these stories, we connect to our real and mythological past, unspooling a thread to our ancestors and the canine stories they told around the campfire.

Left : Image generated in Adobe Firefly AI.

BLACK SHUCK

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Eastern counties, UK

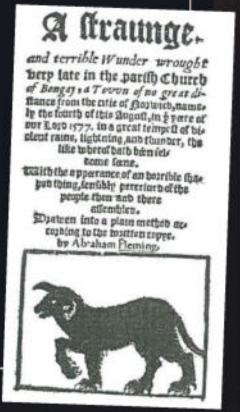
LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Pure fiction

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Enormous black dog – larger than a maned wolf – with thick fur and glowing red eye (sometimes single, sometimes two)

In the annals of cryptozoology, Black Shuck is a superstar. Caught between myth and cryptid lore, tales of this enormous dog, covered in black fur and staring out of the darkness with fiery eyes, go back through the ages. The reports might vary, from two eyes to a cyclops, from a malevolent omen of death to a benign canine, but the fascination remains.

Black Shuck can be found in folklore from Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and the Cambridgeshire Fens, and takes his name from the Old English word 'scucca', meaning devil. He first appeared in print in 1850, but has been a creature of legend for many years before that. In 1577, Black Shuck was reported to crash through the doors of the Holy Trinity Church in Blythburgh, bringing down the steeple and scorching the church door as he savaged two members of the congregation. More recently, Shuck was reported by multiple eyewitnesses in the 1970s, not far from Blythburgh, including a terrified motorcyclist who was pursued by the enormous canine.

While some stories can be put down to large dog sightings or attacks, related cryptids can be found all over the UK, from Cornwall to Lancashire, to Scotland, and in the folklore of Celtic and Germanic people. He is an evocative link to times passed and the folk history of our ancestors, and after centuries in the limelight, will likely remain one of the cornerstones of paranormal cryptid study for centuries yet to come.



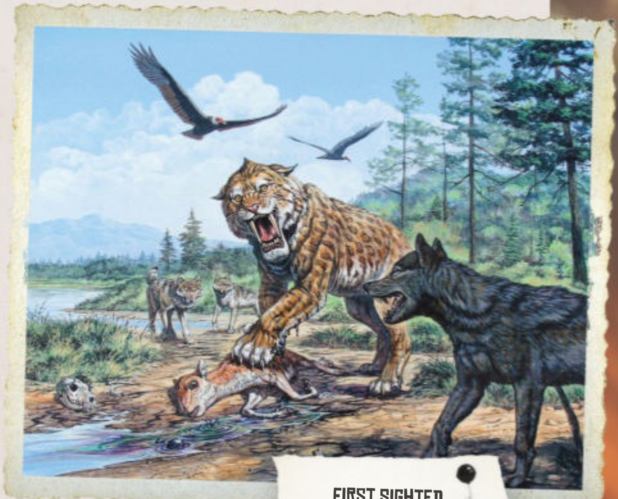
A ſtraunge.
and terrible Wunder wrought
very late in the pariſh Church
of Bongay, a Town of no great di-
ſtance from the citie of Norwich, name-
ly the fourth of this Auguſt, in y^e yeare of
our Lord 1577. in a great tempeſt of vi-
olent raine, lightning, and thunder, the
like whereof hath been ſel-
dome ſeene.
With the apperance of an horrible ſha-
ped thing, ſenſibly perceiued of the
people then and there
aſſembled.
Drawen into a plain method ac-
cording to the written copye.
by Abraham Fleming.

In 1577, Reverend Abraham Fleming published an account of a Black Shuck

THE DIRE WOLF

The dire wolf lived in the Americas between 125,000 and 9,500 years ago. The same size as a modern grey wolf, the dire wolf weighed approximately 68 kilograms (150 pounds) and roamed the plains and grasslands of North America and the savanna of South America. Today, the dire wolf is extinct... or is it?

Cryptid enthusiasts have theorised that some canine cryptid sightings might actually be reports of undocumented dire wolves. Though no evidence has been found, accounts of creatures of Indigenous American mythology, such as the Waheela or Shunka Warak'in, bear striking similarities to the dire wolf. Could this supposedly extinct species really be the basis for legendary creatures of Indigenous American oral tradition?



Thought to be extinct thousands of years ago, could the dire wolf have survived?

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
The Americas

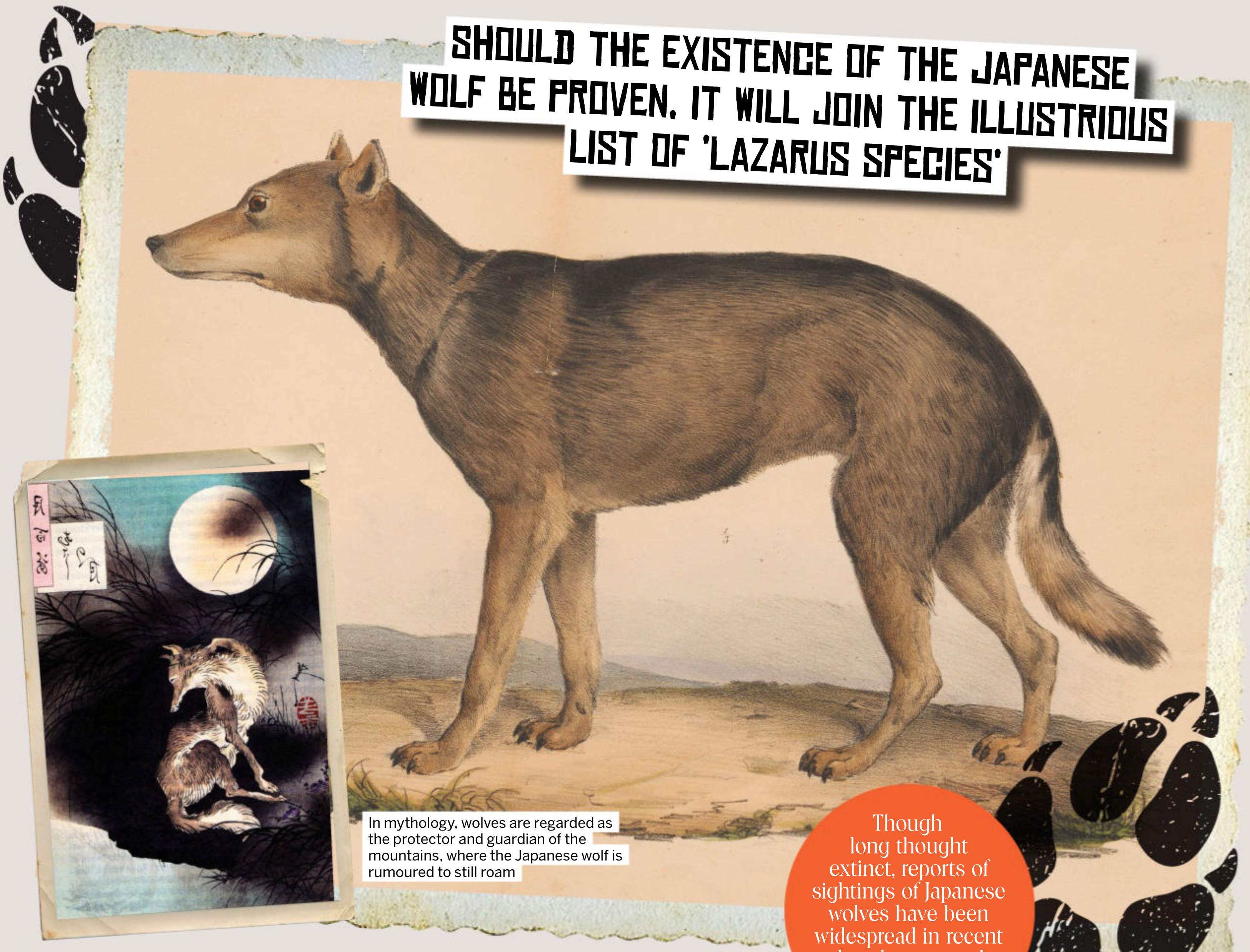
LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Existence confirmed

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Larger and stronger version of a wolf

Long thought extinct, cryptozoologists have theorised that the dire wolf might be behind some reports of canine cryptids

Right: Wiki _PD. Far Right : Image generated in Adobe Firefly AI. Above: Alamy

SHOULD THE EXISTENCE OF THE JAPANESE WOLF BE PROVEN, IT WILL JOIN THE ILLUSTRIOUS LIST OF 'LAZARUS SPECIES'



In mythology, wolves are regarded as the protector and guardian of the mountains, where the Japanese wolf is rumoured to still roam

Though long thought extinct, reports of sightings of Japanese wolves have been widespread in recent decades, centred on the Chichibu district

JAPANESE WOLF

FIRST SIGHTED
20th century

LOCATION
Chichibu, Japan

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Small wolf with brownish fur that is smooth in appearance

In the 1990s, residents of the Chichibu district in Japan reported hearing wolf howls and glimpsing wolves roaming the forests and mountains. This wouldn't be unusual, were it not for the fact that the Japanese wolf has been extinct for over a century. Hiroshi Yagi came face-to-face with one of the creatures in the late 1990s in Chichibu-Tama-Kai National Park, when it crossed the road less than 2.4 metres (six feet) from him. It was so unfazed by his presence that Yagi even offered it a rice cracker. Though the wolf didn't accept the offering, it remained calm and stood for a while before eventually going off on its way.

Yagi took a number of photographs of the creature, which some experts have concluded do show the apparently extinct Japanese wolf. Others have greeted the images with scepticism and have pointed out that there has been no confirmed evidence such as remains, droppings or verified images to back up his claims. There are, however, multiple eyewitness oral accounts that lend credence to Yagi's claims of an encounter with the Japanese wolf. Others speculate that the wolves may have bred with domestic dogs and produced a crossbreed species, which survives in the wild.

Today, Yagi and fellow enthusiasts continue to scour Japan for the evidence they seek, determined to prove that the wolf is not as extinct as it may seem. If they are successful in their search, it will be an important moment in natural history and will offer hope for other species thought lost. Should the existence of the Japanese wolf be proven, it will join the illustrious list of 'Lazarus species', namely those who return from extinction. In the remote mountains and forest of Chichibu, perhaps the latest Lazurus species is waiting to be rediscovered.

Right: 2x images generated in Adobe Firefly AI. Above: Wiki_PD

PRIME HOOK SWAMP CREATURE

In July 2007 a woman and her daughter were driving on a secluded road alongside the Prime Hook Swamp in Broadkill Beach, Delaware, when a small creature bounded out of the swamp in front of her car. Standing on lanky legs at around 0.7 metres (2.5 feet) tall, it was mostly hairless and a tan colour, while its face resembled a pug. When she reported her sighting to locals, others began to admit that they too had spotted the creature out by the swamp, some having seen it many years before. The woman, identified only as Helen J, shared her story on Reddit and the Prime Hook Swamp Creature legend was born.

Though not the most fearsome canine cryptid around, there have been several theories as to what the creature might actually be. Chief among them is that it might well be a coyote with a facial deformation or other medical condition, which would explain both its unusual features and lack of fur. At least one cryptid hobbyist has posited that the creature might actually be an as yet uncatalogued species of primate, but so far no evidence or photographs of the Prime Hook Swamp Creature have been presented.

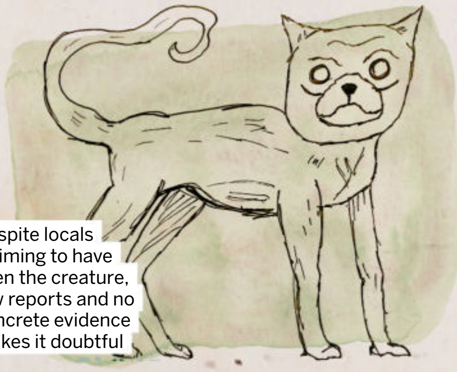
With Helen J's sighting having prompted plenty of speculation but frustratingly few sightings, it seems that we will have to wait a while yet until we hear more from the puggish beast in Delaware.

FIRST SIGHTED
2007

LOCATION
Delaware, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
0.7 to 0.9m (2.5-3 ft) in height; 14kg (30lbs); long legs; hairless and a face that looks like a pug


Despite locals claiming to have seen the creature, few reports and no concrete evidence makes it doubtful

ADJULE

FIRST SIGHTED
1928

LOCATION
North Africa

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Likely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
0.7 to 0.9m (2.5-3 ft) in height, weighing 14 to 20kg (30-45lbs), with thick crimson skin that has a blue tinge, small ears and webbed feet

In 1928, French naturalist Théodore Monod reported a sighting of a pack of unknown creatures in North Africa. Standing at around 0.9 metres (three feet), with crimson skin that bore a bluish tinge and small ears, the creatures resembled a pack of African wild dogs, though they were unlike any that he had seen before. No doubt familiar with the cryptid known as the Adjule, a magical canine from the mythology of the North African Tuareg people that is considered a bad omen, Monod theorised that he had witnessed an as yet undiscovered variety of the African wild dog. Given the rarity of the wild dog in that region of Africa, it is possible that such a species may have been the basis of the myth and just like documented species of wild dogs, the Adjule has no dewclaw.

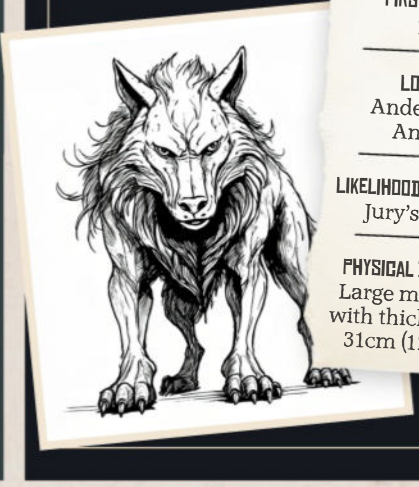
Though no photographs exist of the Adjule, it has been recorded in multiple sightings over the years. The most recent report of the creature was in West Mauritania in 1992. Despite the scarcity of sightings and lack of photographic or physical evidence, many members of the scientific community believe that the Adjule is no myth, but simply a wild dog that has either been misidentified by frightened witnesses or may suffer from a condition such as mange, which would explain the unusual appearance of its skin. The Adjule is one cryptid that may well exist, even if the explanation is more prosaic than the magical wild dogs of legend.

ANDEAN WOLF

In 1927, Lorenz Hagenbeck, circus impresario and son and heir of the founder of Stellingen Zoo in Germany, returned from a trip to Argentina with a pelt that he had purchased from a dealer in Buenos Aires. He claimed that the pelt, which resembled that of a maned wolf and was covered in a thick, dark hair, was that of an as yet undiscovered wild dog of the Andes. Hagenbeck's pelt was studied by German mammal expert, Ingo Krumbiegel, in 1947, who paired it with a large skull he had found in the Andes.

Krumbiegel declared that the pelt and skull were from the same animal, which he believed was a new genus. This genus, he said, was an omnivorous canine that was substantially larger than a maned wolf; he named it Dasycyon hagenbecki. Though American zoologist Howard J Stains supported this claim, other experts believed that the skin had come from nothing more remarkable than a domestic dog and had been erroneously paired with the unrelated skull by Krumbiegel.

While the fate of the skull is unknown, tests were done on hair from the pelt in 1954 and found striking similarities with the fur of a German Shepherd. DNA analysis was carried out again in 2000, but the samples were found to have been contaminated by human, dog, wolf and pig DNA, and had been treated with chemicals. Disappointingly, this meant that no definitive conclusions could be made as to its origin.



FIRST SIGHTED
1927

LOCATION
Andes, South America

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Large maned wolf with thick, dark fur; 31cm (12in) skull

© Getty Images

KNOW YOUR ABCs

Alien Big Cats (ABCs) or Phantom Cats are common terms in cryptozoology, referring to any large feline sighted in a location in which they are not a native species. The majority of these reports relate to large black cats, akin to panthers or pumas seen in North America, Australia and the UK. The most popular theory for these widespread sightings is that these creatures were escapees from zoos or deliberate releases, rather than anything supernatural.

BIG CAT CRYPTIDS

The most common cryptid takes the form of a familiar feline, but beware, these are not your friendly domestic cat. Approach these kittens with caution…

Feline cryptids are inescapable the world over, with over 60 separate cryptid species recognised today. Whether most are simply beings of folklore, or potential examples of real animals hiding in plain sight, phantom and mystery cats continue to frighten and excite communities today. Cats in cryptozoology are commonly separated into different categories including species, source and appearance. Much like domestic cats, most feline cryptids can be sorted into 'Felinae', small or domestic cats; 'Pantherinae, big cats; and 'Machairodontinae'; prehistoric cats. From these classes, cryptids can be sorted into categories associated with explanations of their sources, namely, undocumented hybrids, undocumented species, emergent species, revenants of prehistoric cats and alien big cats. Cat cryptids encompass everything from pre-existing extinct species, such as the Tasmanian Tiger, of which we have both photographs and film footage, through to more unlikely creatures like the Fiskerton Phantom, which terrorised schoolgirls and pheasants before disappearing forever.

Bodmin is a beautiful and desolate place, measuring only 207sq km (80sq mi), but containing a wealth of history and folklore

THE BEAST OF BODMIN MOOR

One of the most infamous cat cryptids, most evidence points towards the Beast being a released puma

FIRST SIGHTED
1978

LOCATION
Cornwall, England

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Likely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
ABC/Black puma

Since the 1970s, there have been over 60 sightings of a jet black panther-like creature with white-yellow eyes and a body that is 0.9-1.5 metres (3-5 feett) in length stalking the picturesque yet wild and desolate landscape of Bodmin Moor in the county of Cornwall, England. Many local farmers and stable owners are convinced of its existence and blame the Beast for sporadic livestock mutilations that continue to this day.

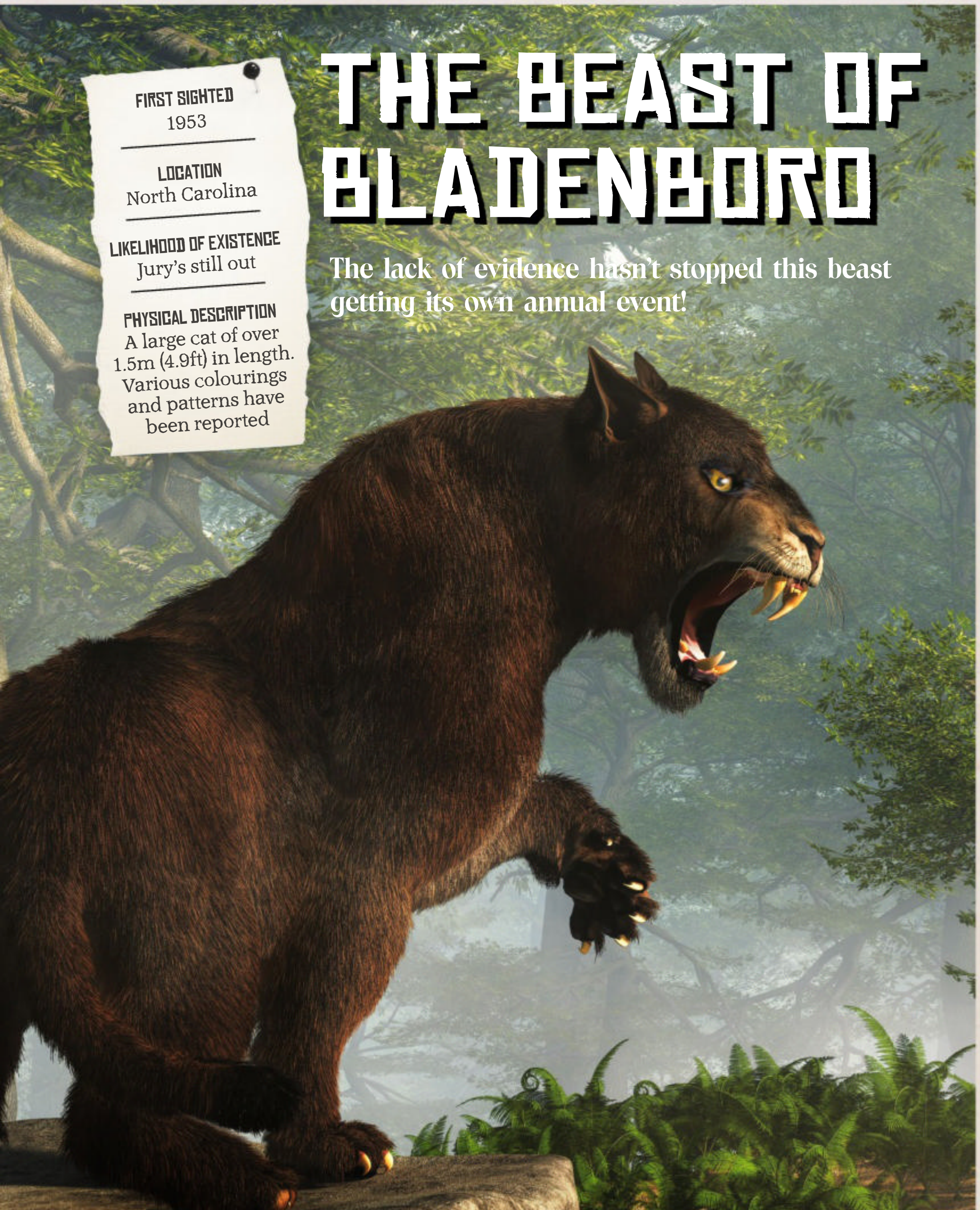
In 1995, the government ordered an official investigation into the Beast's existence, but could find no proof that a phantom puma had made the moors its home. Shortly after, a young boy found a big cat skull on the banks of the River Fowey, but the Natural History Museum concluded that it was a leopard skull, likely imported as a rug. In 1998, a big black cat that fitted the Beast's description was caught on video prowling the moor, finally adding credence to the claims. Shockingly, following the 'Dangerous And Wild Animals Act', which created stricter welfare rules for exotic pet owners, two former zookeepers admitted releasing several pumas onto the moors in the 1970s and 1980s, creating a pack that could have survived well into the 2010s.

The true nature of the Beast of Bodmin has never been explained – is it a puma, a surviving extinct species of wild cat, something supernatural or nothing more than the simple power of suggestibility?

© Alamy and Getty Images

THE BEAST OF BLADENBORO

The lack of evidence hasn't stopped this beast getting its own annual event!



FIRST SIGHTED
1953

LOCATION
North Carolina

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
A large cat of over 1.5m (4.9ft) in length. Various colourings and patterns have been reported

Between the winter of 1953 and 1954, at least nine dogs, a rabbit, a handful of chickens and five pigs were found dead, some with their skulls crushed in, others completely decapitated. A few had been drained of blood. The people of Bladenboro, North Carolina, were at a loss to know who, or what, had committed the mutilations but they were determined to find out. Initial sightings reported a large, 'sleek', black animal measuring 1.5 metres (five feet) in length, which killed two dogs in the neighbouring town of Clarkton. Throughout early January, hundreds of people came to help look for the culprit, but had no clear consensus on what they were expecting to find. Most witnesses described a large predatory cat, similar to a cougar, while others suggested it resembled a massive coyote-like creature or even a bear. A bobcat was captured and shot but the mutilations continued into December 1954. Even after multiple large hunting parties, some with over 1,000 attendees, a beast fitting any of the reported descriptions was never captured.

Although the beast lives on as a spectre of fear in local folklore, it has also entered Bladenboro popular culture, where a community organisation organises an annual 'Beast Fest' with entertainment and food vendors, over which the Beast of Bladenboro (or 'Bob') presides as a harmless mascot.

EASTERN COUGAR

The Eastern Cougar, also known as the Eastern Puma, was a name proposed for eastern cougar populations in the USA, separating them from other established populations in the west. Classified as 'presumed extinct' in 2011/18, the continued existence of the Eastern Cougar subspecies is a source of contention. The Eastern Cougar is surrounded by scientific uncertainty, with its existence confirmed, but the date of its extinction varying wildly from the 1930s (last confirmed sighting 1938) to the present day. Since the 1960s, communities in eastern North America have reported upwards of 10,000 sightings, supporting the theory that a breeding population survives in some capacity. However, genetic testing has suggested that all surviving North American cougar populations are of the same subspecies, placing the Eastern Cougar back on the extinction list.

FIRST SIGHTED
Uncertain

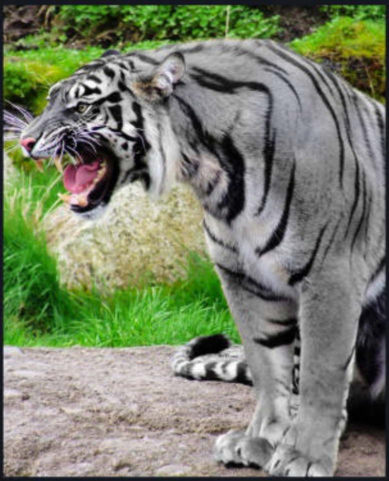
LOCATION
Unknown

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Existence confirmed

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Cougar /ABC

The Eastern Cougar population in North America is presumed to be extinct, yet occasional sightings suggest that a

MALTESE TIGER



Right: Wiki CC Credit: Mamapajama97 on Flickr

The Maltese Tiger – also known as the Blue Tiger, for obvious reasons – is a colour variation reported almost exclusively in the Fujian province of South East China. Sharing physical characteristics with the familiar orange tiger, the Maltese Tiger differs in that it has blue-tinged fur and grey stripes. The Maltese Tiger has featured in Chinese art for centuries, but there have been surprisingly few sightings of the beautiful creature.

Harry Caldwell, an American big game hunter, claimed to have seen and hunted a Maltese Tiger close to Fuzhou in 1910, yet no photographs, illustrations or pelts remain of the expedition. As Maltese (blue-toned) domestic cats and hypermelanistic tigers – such as tigers that appear black due to extra-wide stripes – exist, some believe there is no question that the tiger existed, however genetically, it appears unlikely.

The Maltese Tiger may have actually been a variation on the endangered South Chinese tiger, which is critically endangered, owing to its use in traditional medicines. It would stand to reason that any unusual subspecies may have sadly met the same unfortunate fate.

FIRST SIGHTED
1910

LOCATION
South East China

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
A large, blue-toned tiger

TASMANIAN TIGER [THYLACINE]

It looks like a creature dreamt up by a crytpid hoaxer, but this cat was real

Unlike many other cryptids and big cats, the Tasmanian Tiger has a proven record of existence. The Tasmanian Tiger was a dog-like marsupial that once roamed freely in Australia, Tasmania and New Guinea. Although it appeared to be largely extinct from the mainland (possibly attributed to the introduction of the dingo or climate change), up to 5,000 animals were believed to exist in Tasmania at the time of the arrival of European settlers in the 19th century. Assumed to be a threat to livestock and communities, the Tasmanian Tiger was hunted to extinction, with the last known example dying in Hobart Zoo in 1936. While the animal's stripes contributed to its naming as a 'tiger', it was not as fearsome as those that share its name. The Tasmanian Tiger could open its muscular jaws up to 80 degrees, bearing its 46 sharp teeth, however it lacked the strength to feasibly kill livestock.

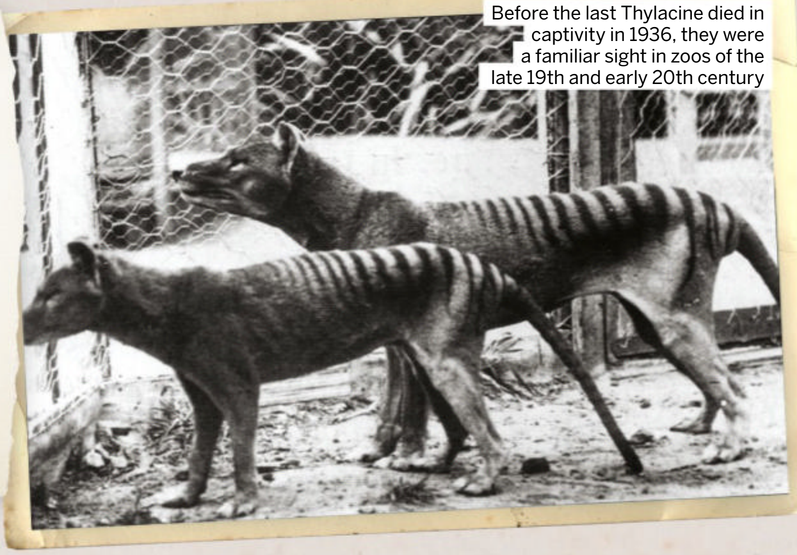
Despite having thought to be extinct, between 1936-98, 203 sightings were reported, with new studies suggesting a small wild population could have existed long after the Hobart Zoo Thylacine. It was recently proposed by the University of Tasmania that the likely window of extinction occurred between the 1990s and 2000s. While the University deduced that there is a "less than 1% chance" of the creature still existing, that is enough to encourage other cryptozoologists to continue the search.

FIRST SIGHTED
c.1772

LOCATION
Australia

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Existence confirmed

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
A quadruped that has pointed ears, long tail and huge jaws, with stripes on its back. Weirdly quite dog-like in its appearance



Before the last Thylacine died in captivity in 1936, they were a familiar sight in zoos of the late 19th and early 20th century

Left: @ Getty Images

THE QUEENSLAND TIGER [YARRI]

Could this be another tale of humans eradicating a species?

Much like the Tasmanian Tiger, the Queensland Tiger is another possible example of a large feline marsupial hunted to extinction by human settlers – in fact the Queensland Tiger is thought by many to be simply a mainland variant of the Thylacine. Indigenous tales of what they dubbed the 'Yarri' date back hundreds of years, and while there are countless reports of hunters capturing and killing them, there is little remaining evidence of its existence save for a rather ambiguous single low-quality photograph. Believed to mainly dwell in trees, the Queensland Tiger is said to be an incredibly aggressive animal, measuring between 1.2-1.5 metres (4-5 feet), which is roughly the size of a dingo) but with a stockier build and large claws and fangs. It is reportedly a fast and agile creature. As the alleged species has never been confirmed, there is no extinction date, and reports of Yarri sightings have periodically occurred throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

ALASKAN TIGER

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Alaska, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

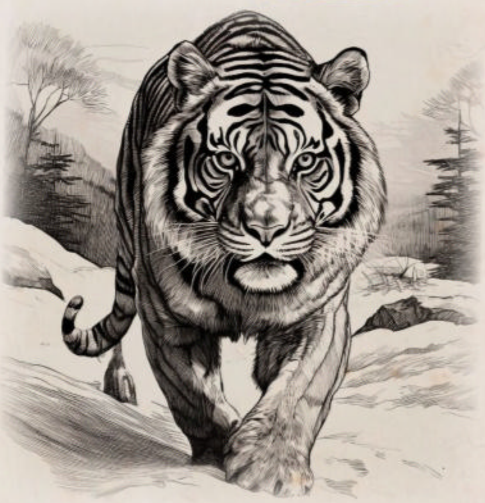
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Large striped feline, brown in colour with black stripes, weighing up to 325kg (716lb)

While it's possible tigers once roamed Alaska, is it a possibility today?

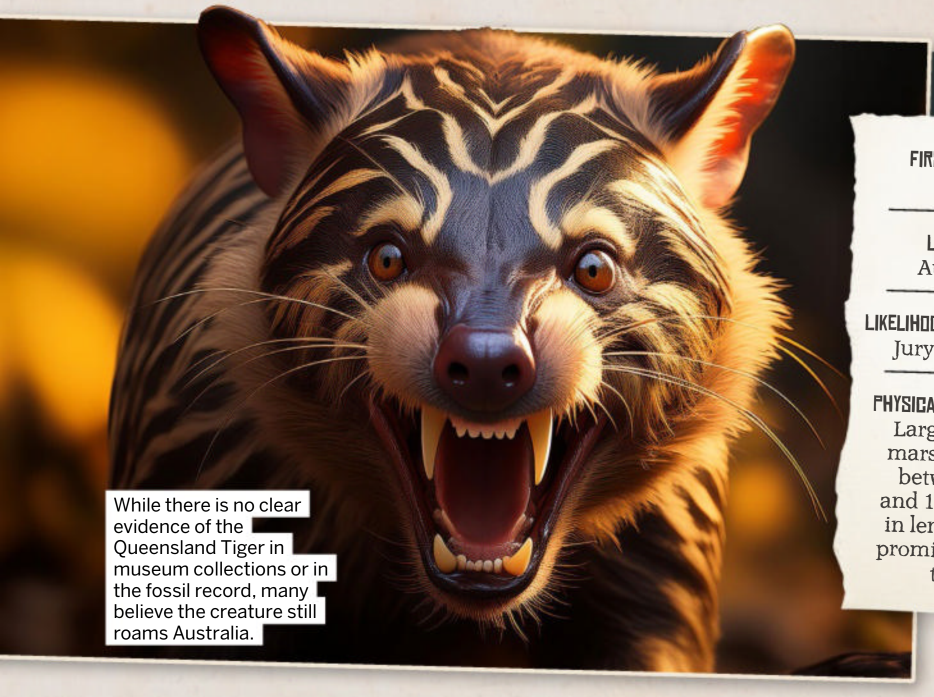
The unforgiving landscape of Alaska may have supported a tiger population thousands of years ago, but is unlikely to nurture a community today

The Alaskan Tiger is a species of prehistoric cave tiger, believed to have inhabited parts of Alaska between 12,000 BCE and 4,000 BCE. Much like the Siberian tiger, the Alaskan Tiger was thought to withstand incredibly low temperatures and most natural predators. As such, some cryptozoologists believe that very small numbers of Alaskan Tigers have survived and continue to roam the Alaskan wilderness.

A handful of videos have emerged in recent years, reporting to prove its existence, but none have been deemed as reliable. The odds are not in the Alaskan Tigers' favour; there is no substantive food source and the large number of native wolves suggest that there are no other apex predators in the environment. While ancient tigers may have once inhabited Alaska, their existence today is extremely unlikely.



Below and Right: Image generated in Adobe Firefly AI. Above: @ Getty Images



While there is no clear evidence of the Queensland Tiger in museum collections or in the fossil record, many believe the creature still roams Australia.

FIRST SIGHTED
1871

LOCATION
Australia

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Large striped marsupial cat, between 1.2 and 1.5m (4-5ft) in length, with prominent front teeth

ZANZIBAR LEOPARD

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Zanzibar, Tanzania

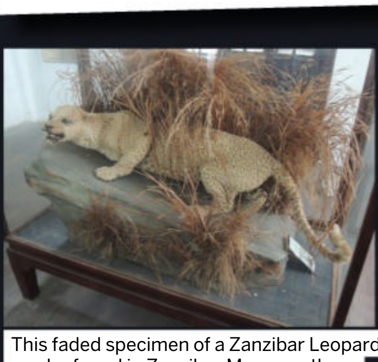
LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Existence confirmed

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
A leopard of smaller stature, whose coat had clustered rosettes around its neck

The Zanzibar Leopard is a confirmed big cat, which was hunted to local extinction in the mid-1990s. While many local farmers hunted the leopard population as a means of preserving their livestock, the greatest threat to the leopard was an increased belief in witchcraft. Many rural communities believe that witches keep leopards as pets and can send them into communities to do their evil bidding, and as communities grew, fears of the leopard's encroachment increased.

Following the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964, a campaign was launched by a witchfinder that further deepened the association of witches with leopards, and encouraged hunting of the animals on a massive scale. Despite being considered functionally extinct, several later sightings and camera footage from 2018 showing a leopard in the wild, have slowly increased conservationists' hope that there is a restored population.

THE ZANZIBAR WAS HUNTED TO LOCAL EXTINCTION



This faded specimen of a Zanzibar Leopard can be found in Zanzibar Museum; there are few other taxidermised examples currently in existence

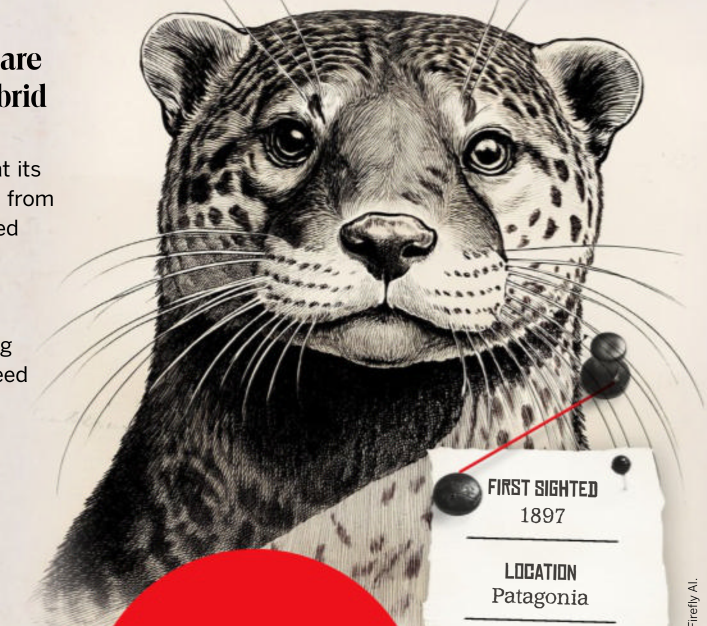
Right: Wiki CC Credit: Peter Maas

LEMISCH

Modern anthropologists are quick to dismiss this hybrid

First sighted in 1897 in the Lake Colhué region of Argentina, the Lemisch is an unusual cryptid, described as being a jaguar-otter hybrid, with its size ranging from miniscule to the size of an ox. The primary evidence for the Lemisch's existence comes from a 1955 book by Belgian-French zoologist, Bernard Heuvelmans, and later work by German anthropologist, Robert-Lehmann-Nitsche, who claimed to have obtained a piece of the Lemisch's skin, stating that its bony, armoured skin protected it from arrowheads. These works included reports from local communities, reciting tales of the Lemisch and behavioural aspects, stating that the Lemisch produced a terrifying scream, was able to travel at speed on both land and water and was most likely a new subspecies of otter. However, modern anthropologists regard these works as fantastical, with the name 'Lemisch' having no discernible link to any local language or community.

THE LEMISCH PRODUCED A TERRIFYING SCREAM



Left: Image generated in Adobe Firefly AI.

The Lemisch is an unlikely otter whose existence appears to have been deliberately fabricated by European zoologists

FIRST SIGHTED
1897

LOCATION
Patagonia

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Pure fiction

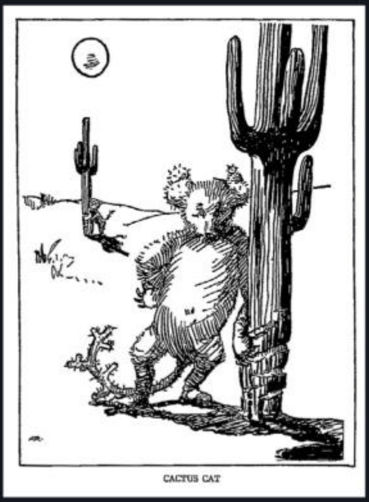
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
An otter-jaguar hybrid, ranging in size from minuscule to as big as an ox

FEARSOME CRITTERS

Spending all of your time working out in the fields and wilderness opens up all sorts of opportunities for some strange feline animal encounters – and the creation of some even stranger stories.

For example, take the Cactus Cat. In a story popularised by cowboys and pioneers, the Cactus Cat would use two large spikes to swipe against cactuses in daylight, then leave, only to return late at night to drink the fermented juice!

The Wampus Cat has been described as a combination of a mountain lion and a human woman, while the Splinter Cat headbutts trees to find its prey. Creatures like the Silver and Ball-Tailed cats use their tails as snake-like weapons or wrecking balls, while the Glawackus is part-cat, part-dog and part-bear!



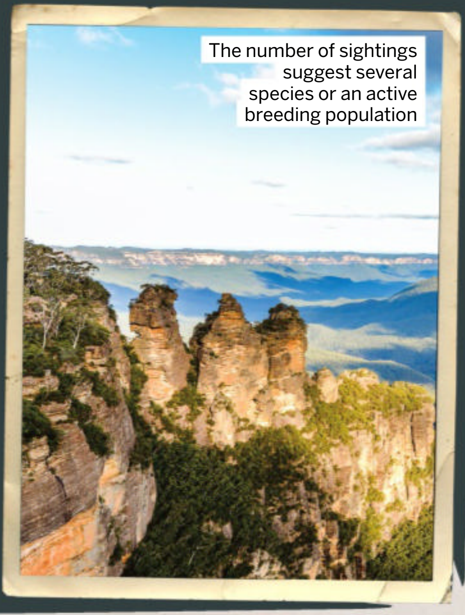
CACTUS CAT

Right: Wiki_PD

BLUE MOUNTAINS PANTHER

Could WWII soldiers have created a big cat population in Australia's Blue Mountains area?

Also known as the Lithgow Panther, the Blue Mountains Panther has been sighted over 500 times in a 20-year period. Anthropologists theorise that the source may be escaped pets from the days of the exotic animal trade in the 19th century, or exhibits from a travelling menagerie. One popular theory is that the Blue Mountains Panther population may be descendants from abandoned WWII mascots of American soldiers. Many soldiers transported exotic animals on their ships, many of which were adorable little cubs who grew up to be unmanageable adults. The frequency of sightings resulted in the commissioning of several official enquiries. One such enquiry yielded the conclusion that the likely culprit of many sightings and livestock attacks was indeed a 'large feline predator'.

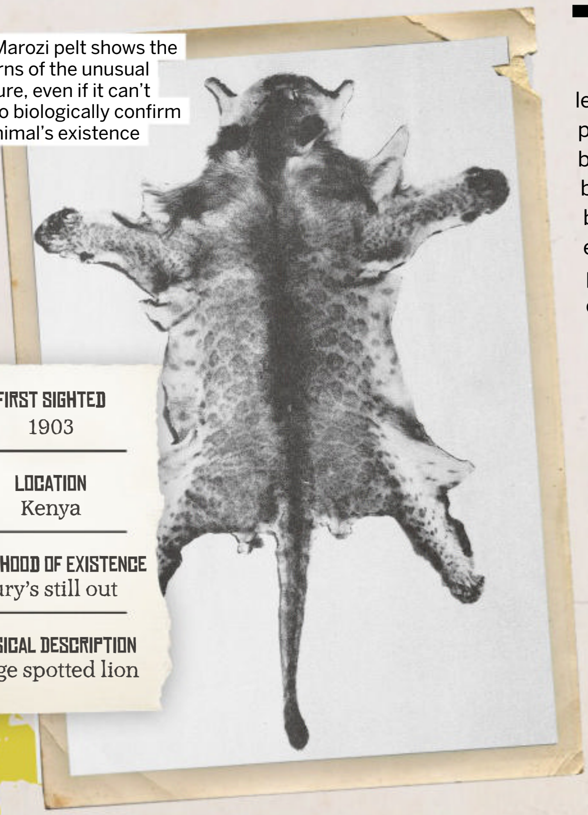


The number of sightings suggest several species or an active breeding population

Left: © Getty Images

MAROZI

With pelts but no photos, the jury's out on the Marozi



This Marozi pelt shows the patterns of the unusual creature, even if it can't help to biologically confirm the animal's existence

FIRST SIGHTED
1903

LOCATION
Kenya

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Large spotted lion

The Marozi was reportedly a large spotted feline, giving the appearance of a lion with leopard's spots. There are several purported Marozi pelts captured by hunters in the 20th century, but none have provided sufficient biological evidence of the species' existence. Today, some biologists propose that the Marozi is a colour morph of an established lion subspecies, which retained its juvenile markings into adulthood.

First documented by westerners in 1903, Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen reported seeing lions with leopard-like markings, an assertion that was met with disinterest from the scientific community. Later, western hunters and explorers returned with sightings, partial skins and circumstantial evidence such as footprints, but never managed to produce a full specimen or photographic evidence.

GIPPSLAND PHANTOM CAT

The name 'Gippsland Phantom Cat' relates to multiple sightings of unknown big cats, sighted within the Gippsland region of southeastern Victoria, Australia. Reports of the Gippsland Phantom Cat have been received steadily since the 1970s, with a deer hunter in 2005 claiming to have killed the phantom cat, removing its tail and discarding its body in the river. However, DNA testing on the tail determined that the animal was part feral cat, and not an exotic animal. Much like other Australian 'Phantom Cats', it is believed that many of these sightings may have originated with the release of panther or puma mascots following WWII.

Left: Wiki_PD State Library and Archives of Florida

THE FISKERTON PHANTOM

This feline cryptid ended up as a cartoon character!

The Fiskerton Phantom is a strange-looking bipedal feline cryptid, first sighted in Fiskerton, Lincolnshire by four schoolgirls. Staying at a caravan park close to the rural hamlet of Short Ferry, the girls reported seeing a bear-like animal that was 1.2 metre (four feet) tall, eating a pheasant. The girls immediately fled to seek help. Returning to the site with assistance, a pair of large footprints was found, but nothing else. There were several other sightings of the creature in 1997, but no other sightings since. The cryptid is largely believed to be a hoax or native animal. The Fiskerton Phantom lives on in popular culture through the American *Secret Saturdays* cartoon, where the Fiskerton 'gorilla-cat' is a main character.

Fiskerton in Lincolnshire is a quiet, rural village that played unwitting host to an unexpected cryptid visitation in 1997

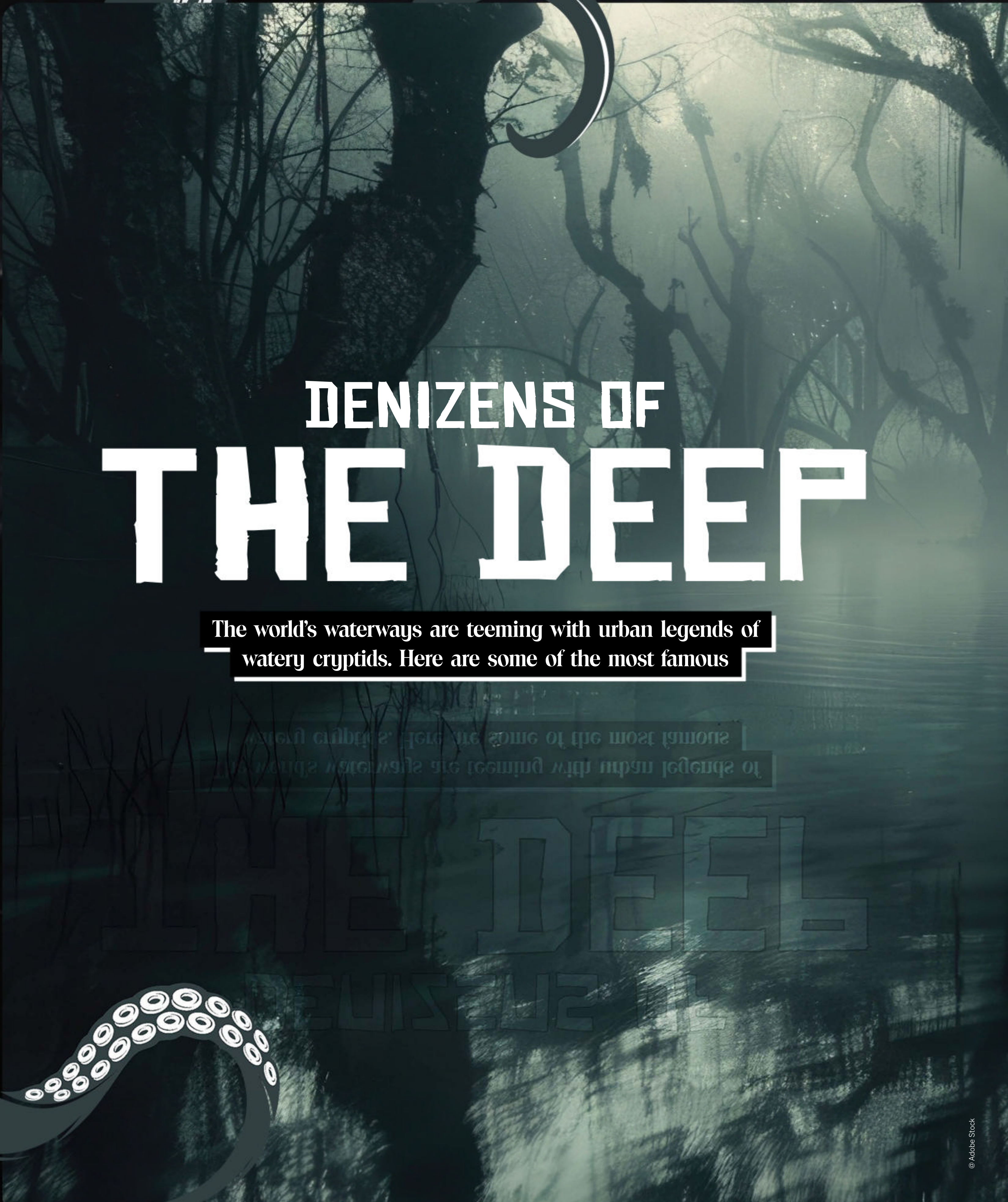
Right: Image generated in Adobe Firefly AI.

FIRST SIGHTED
1997

LOCATION
Lincolnshire, England

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Pure fiction

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Black bipedal ABC, that either looks like a bear or a panther



DENIZENS OF THE DEEP

The world's waterways are teeming with urban legends of watery cryptids. Here are some of the most famous

© Adobe Stock

It's well known that we know less about what's at the bottom of the sea than we do about space. Disastrous attempts to traverse the deep ocean, like the tragic Titan submersible implosion of 2023, show that, even though at times we might deem ourselves superior in fortitude to our scaredy-cat forebears when it comes to ocean-going, we still have good reason to fear stepping foot beyond the surface.

It's therefore of little surprise that, historically, many societies had to walk an unsteady path when it came to Earth's water systems – both embracing the bounties and opportunities that they could offer and instilling in their curious children a healthy sense of caution about its many dangers.

In that spirit, the cast of folktale cryptid characters inhabiting seas, rivers, lakes, marshlands and creeks is wide and varied: from Japan's impish Kapa; Britain's girlish-horse hybrid Kelpies and Water Hags; Central America's Ahuizotl or Water Dogs; to the piecemeal depictions of multiple sea serpents reported to across oceans. They have even made cameos in our holy books, with creatures such as the Leviathan – a giant serpent, and one of God's first creations, alongside its land-based sibling the Behemoth – being depicted in the Bible.

You might assume that with the advent and widespread acceptance of Darwin's Origin Of Species, these tales might have ceased. In fact, if anything, the themes veritably multiplied. Firstly, because colonial explorations and the Communication Age, meant that people far removed from native cultures learned of, and disseminated news of, what dwelled in far-flung swamps and rivers of the New World. Previously, those tales would only have been hyperlocal.

Secondly, because in terms of water-dwelling cryptids, the understanding of precisely what species survived the mass extinction event as living dinosaurs has complicated things further. In many cases, it was water-dwelling species that stood the greatest chances of survival in the food chain, such as crocodilian reptiles, turtles, platypuses, crustaceans and sharks.

And that's before we even get to the deep ocean dwellers… anyone who has seen David Attenborough's *Blue Planet* documentary series will know that truth can be stranger than fiction when it comes to the deep ocean and even inland bodies of water. The once terror-inducing mythical creature of the Kraken, as one case in point, has been almost decisively confirmed as having its origins in the very much non-mythical species known as 'giant squid', which are thought to grow between 12 and 15 metres (39 and 49 feet). Then again, some have argued that such a simple explanation doesn't quite account for thousands of years of varied sightings in which the Kraken's squid-tentacle-like form was only one chapter in its shape-shifting history.

The obsession has consequently not gone away, with many cryptid enthusiasts – no matter what their underlying belief systems or backgrounds – still finding fascination in what lies beneath…

NESSIE

Lurking beneath the waters of Loch Ness is a mysterious creature. But what is the real identity of the Loch Ness Monster?

Dwelling in the stunning locale of the northern Scottish highlands, the Loch Ness Monster – or Nessie, as she's known to her friends – resides in a sparsely populated area that has played host to both turbulent human history and deep-rooted folklore for centuries.

The idea of a monstrous creature lurking in the depths of Loch Ness is nothing new. The first mention of such a beast dates back to the 6th century, when, in the Life Of St Columba, the Irish saint saves one of his companions from a water beast in the River Ness while visiting the land of the Picts on a missionary visit. Recoiling at the saint's use of the sign of the cross, the creature is said to have retreated "as though pulled by rope". A manuscript by Walter of Bingham in the 12th century also references a creature in the loch itself; showing something that resembles a bear.

It wasn't until the 1930s, however, that the Loch Ness Monster became the serpent-like creature that we know today. In 1933, an account in the *Inverness Courier* newspaper recorded how on 22 July, George Spicer experienced the shock of his life. A creature, estimated to be around 12 metres (39 feet) in length, with a long, wavy neck, crossed the road in front of his car before disappearing into the loch beyond. After this account, 'Nessie' fever was soon in full swing, with reports of a serpent-like creature or creatures living within the loch coming in across the next few years, sparking a decades-long fascination with everything Loch Ness.

Given this interest in what might lurk beneath the waters of the loch, it's not surprising that there have been many attempts to prove the existence of the monster over the years. The Loch Ness Phenomena Investigation Bureau Ltd was in operation from 1962 to 1972, but failed to obtain the necessary proof to confirm Nessie's identity. Tours to try and spot the monster have been popular over the years, with tourists and serious investigators alike making the trip to the area, hoping to catch a glimpse of Nessie.

Definitive photographic proof of Nessie has proven elusive, though. The first picture purporting to depict the creature was taken by Hugh Gray in the same year as Spicer's sighting. It was later proven to be an otter, rolling over in the water of the loch. The infamous 'Surgeon's Photograph' of 1934 was likewise finally disproved in 1994: it turned out to have been a hoax using a toy submarine. Later photos have also proved to have mundane explanations. Video footage has likewise led to nothing, as although on several occasions videos have been captured of long, unidentifiable shapes trailing boats from beneath, so far there has been no evidence that points to a monster.

So if it's not a monster in the loch, what is it? An early popular theory to explain the various sightings was that Nessie is in fact a

The earliest sightings of a monster in the loch were bear-like, not the serpent-like creature we know today

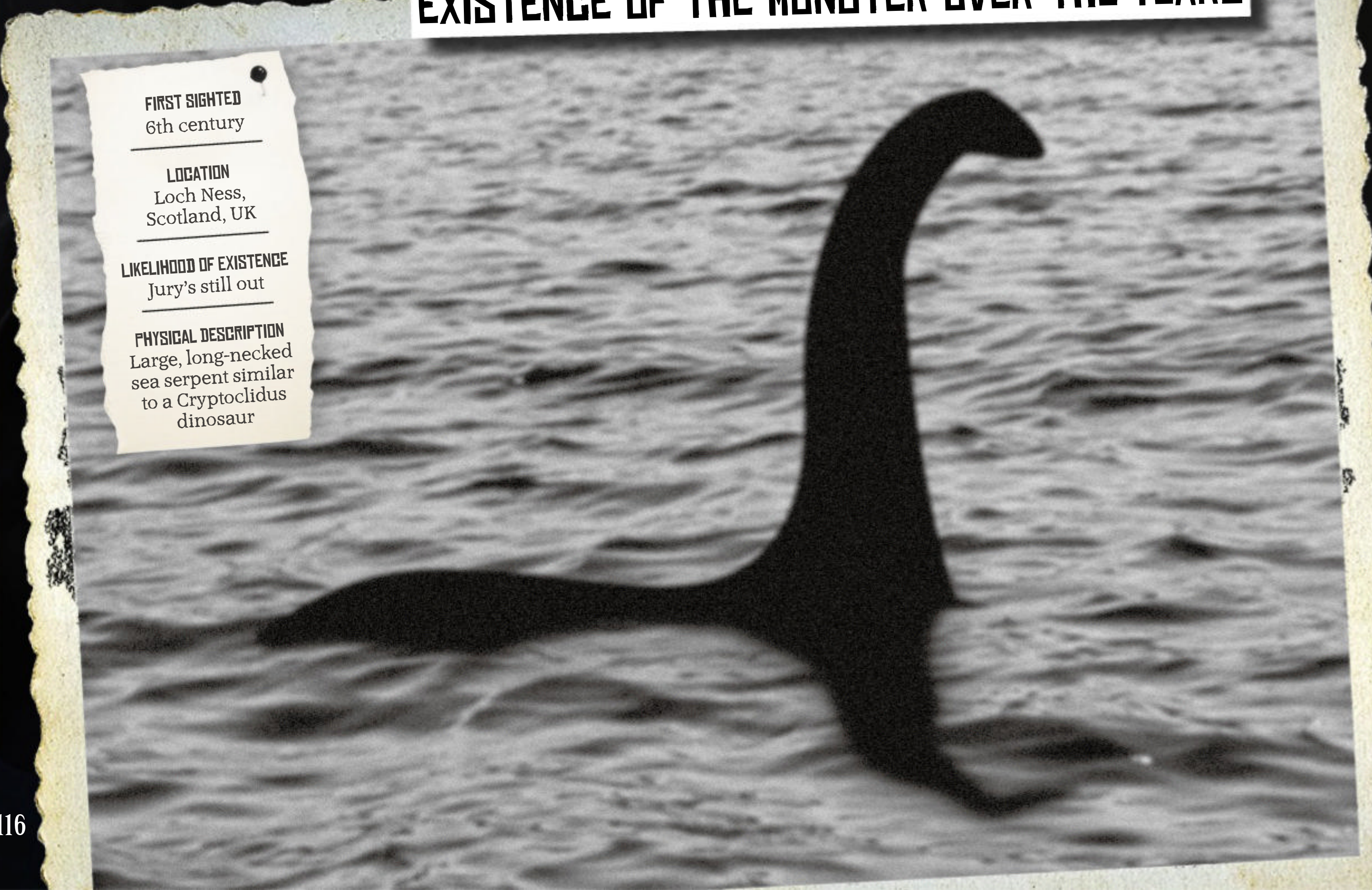
THERE HAVE BEEN MANY ATTEMPTS TO PROVE THE EXISTENCE OF THE MONSTER OVER THE YEARS

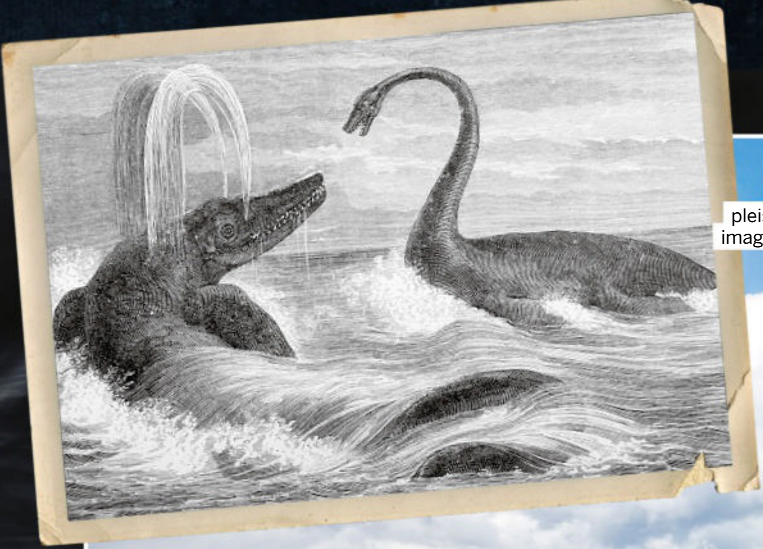
FIRST SIGHTED
6th century

LOCATION
Loch Ness, Scotland, UK

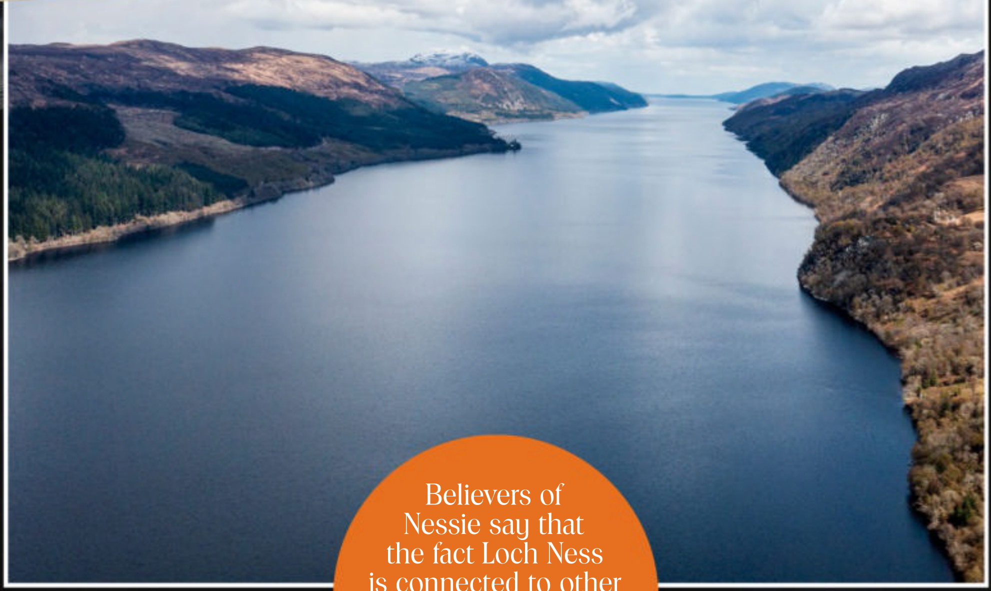
LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Large, long-necked sea serpent similar to a Cryptoclidus dinosaur





Left: This illustration of a fight between an ichthyosaurus and pleisiosaurus shows how closely our imagining of Nessie is to the dinosaur



Believers of Nessie say that the fact Loch Ness is connected to other rivers and the sea means that it is big enough to play host to the monster

living dinosaur, specifically a plesiosaur – that is, an order of extinct marine reptile that was assumed to have been wiped out with most other dinosaur species. However neat this idea is, palaeontologists remain sceptical: for one thing, a warm-blooded reptile such as the plesiosaur would struggle to survive even underwater in such cold climes, much less raise its head above water in the majestic manner often reported in sightings. For another, such a creature would likely be huge and ravenous – and as big as the loch is in relative UK terms, it would likely require a much larger feeding ground.

On the other hand, some have pointed out that Loch Ness is not just any old suburban pond. The most voluminous lake in the UK (and second deepest in Scotland), it contains more water than all of the lakes in England and Wales combined. And if you take into account its physical interconnection with a chain of other lakes and rivers in Scotland, it is technically true to say that it could be reached from the sea. This in itself has led to speculation that Nessie – whoever she is – leads a more nomadic lifestyle than first thought, and even that Loch Ness has played host to other waterborne cryptids from across the pond.

Other explanations that have been put forward over the years are varied in nature, and include misidentification of animals or objects such as otters or driftwood, eels, seismic gas, or just plain old hoaxes. It is likely that there is no single explanation for Nessie, and while the creature continues to remain elusive, interest will never totally vanish.

NESSIE IN FICTION

DR WHO [1975]

In a 1970s sci-fi spin on the legend, Nessie is re-imagined as an extraterrestrial sea creature dubbed Skarasen, transported to Earth by the Doctor's foes de jour, the Zygons. In this multi-episode story arc, during the Tom Baker era of the popular BBC show, the aliens puppeteer the sea creature via remote control in order to enact their own misdeeds.

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES [1970]

Another creative re-imagining of the mysterious creature's true nature, this time we see Nessie depicted as being, in fact, a cleverly-disguised pre-WWI submarine gathering intelligence for the British Navy as part of an intrigue involving Sherlock's troublesome brother, Mycroft.

THE WATER HORSE: LEGEND OF THE DEEP [2007]

Based on the popular Dick King Smith novel of the same name, the Loch Ness Monster mythology is tied in with that of the Celtic Kelpie folklore, usually depicted as a waterborne horse-like creature that is able to shape-shift into human form. The story follows a young boy living in the Loch Ness area as he nurtures a mysterious egg that will later become a full-grown sea serpent.

Believers, serious hunters or those who are just curious make the trip to the loch, hoping to get that sighting

© Getty Images

MORAG

Has this grief-stricken mermaid evolved into a serpent creature?

At over 310 metres (1,017 feet) Loch Morar in the Scottish Highlands is the deepest body of freshwater in the British Isles, and its depths are reputedly the home of Morag. Legends of her go back centuries, but disagree on her form. In some she is the ancestral fetch of the local clan, a mermaid with flowing hair last seen lamenting when Aeneas Macdonnell died in 1898, and who can be heard weeping by night over the loss of her human clansfolk. In others, Morag's appearance has morphed into that of a lake serpent. In 1969 two men, Duncan McDonell and William Simpson, reported their boat hit a brown creature that was nine metres (30 feet) in length, with three dorsal fins and a head that was 12 inches (30 centimetres) in width, which then retaliated, only stopping when Simpson shot at it with a rifle. Morag sank out of sight, and back into the depths of mystery.

FIRST SIGHTED
Ancient times

LOCATION
Scottish highlands

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Either like a serpent
or a mermaid

Are Loch Morar's deep, cold waters really home to the legendary Morag, and can she be heard weeping on the shore?

FIRST SIGHTED
2006

LOCATION
Lake Windermere,
England

Unlikely

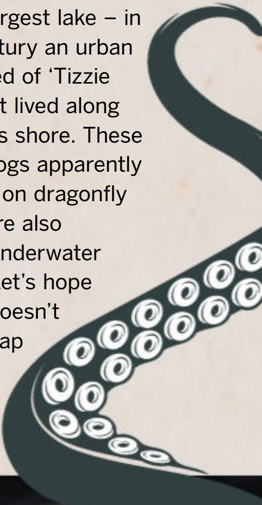
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Sea serpent-like

As England's largest lake, it's no surprise that Windermere has attracted stories of sea creatures

BOWNESSIE

Don't expect more than a few ripples from this one…

Sometimes known as Winnie, Lake Windermere's resident cryptid is most often referred to as Bownessie, a portmanteau of her famous Scottish counterpart in Loch Ness and Windermere's nearby town of Bowness. A lot smaller than some of her peers at, variously, "the length of three cars" or "five or six metres long" (16-19 feet), Bownessie is thought to boast three humps along her back. That's if she's spotted at all – the most common sign of her presence is a series of long ripples. She's not the only creature to settle on England's largest lake – in the 20th century an urban myth emerged of 'Tizzie Whizzies' that lived along Windermere's shore. These little hedgehogs apparently buzz around on dragonfly wings, but are also formidable underwater swimmers. Let's hope Bownessie doesn't decide to snap them up for her supper!



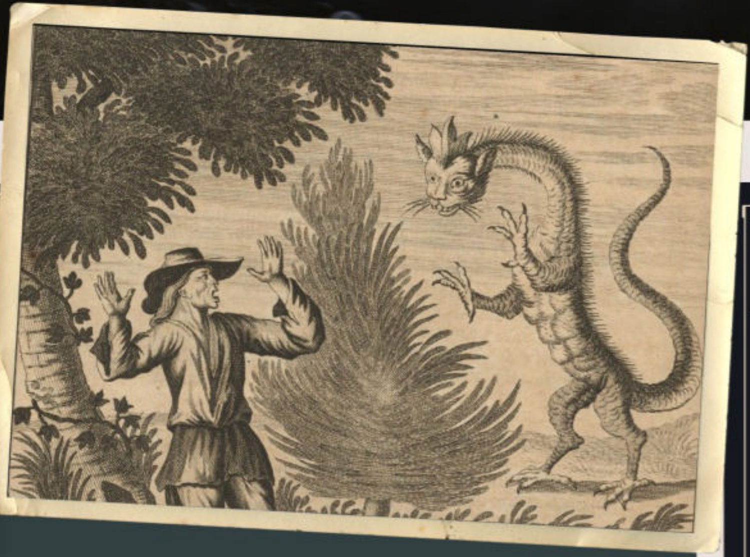
© Alamy and Getty Images

FIRST SIGHTED
1779

LOCATION
Bavaria, Germany

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Cat-headed lizard, with stubby legs, around 2.1m (7ft) in height



Wiki P.D Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (author) - Houghton Library

TATZELWURM

Rejoice in this whistling crown-wearing cat-lizard

Along the Auerbach river in Bavaria, Germany, there is a pair of waterfalls near the town of Oberaudorf, known as the Tatzelwurm Waterfalls. It's a beautiful place to take a walk, but beware of being caught out there on a humid summer's day when the weather is turning towards a storm, for these are the conditions favoured by the Tatzelwurm itself. This monster, also known as Stollenwurm or Arassas, is a large cat-headed lizard around 2.1 metres (seven feet) in length, with short stubby legs, which likes to whistle and scream at passersby and sometimes wears a little crown. Between the 17th and 19th centuries, several elderly gentlemen were believed to have encountered the beasts in various Alpine waterside locations in Austria, Switzerland and Germany. These unfortunate seniors all died at home of a heart attack soon afterwards. Although this is sad, they may well have suffered a worse fate: the Tatzelwurm is alleged to suck blood and have poisonous breath.

FIRST SIGHTED
Pre-Columbian era

LOCATION
Lake Pepin, Wisconsin, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
There isn't much known about Pepie's description, beyond being snake-like and large

In winter, Lake Pepin's ice can be up to 12in (30cm) thick, meaning local monster, Pepie, needs to be able to survive the extreme cold

PEPIE

Will anyone find proof of this cold-loving sea serpent?

One creature with a bounty on its head is Pepie of Lake Pepin, a lake on the Mississippi River situated between Minnesota and Wisconsin (also the birthplace of waterskiing). In 2008 Lake City businessman Larry Nielson offered a reward of $50,000 for the capture, or any footage of, Pepie, which is believed to be a snake-like creature with its roots in Indigenous American folklore. The local Dakota were rumoured to switch their usual birch bark canoes for thicker dugout vessels when they had to traverse the lake because Pepin's mysterious monster was able to bite through the flimsier river craft. Pepie must be pretty tough: with an average depth of just 6.4 metres (21 feet), Lake Pepin can ice up hard in the harsh Minnesota winter – famous local author Laura Ingalls Wilder even wrote about driving a cart across the frozen lake in iconic American novel *Little House on the Prairie* – meaning Pepie would have to be able to cope with some pretty extreme cold to survive.

STORSJÖODJURET

Another cat-headed creature, the Storsjöodjuret (literally 'great lake monster' in Swedish) is considerably more formidable than the Tatzelwurm – and has a more disturbing backstory. Legend has it that this gigantic water serpent, thought to live in Sweden's Storsjön lake, is the product of a bizarre experiment by two trolls, who brewed it up in a cauldron – this accounts for the second part of its name: 'odjur' means 'unanimal'. According to a manuscript from 1635, the famous sorcerer, Kettil Runske, bound the creature – which is a rå, or the guardian spirit of a place – under a runestone on the island in the middle of the lake. It was said if the runestone was ever deciphered, the monster would reappear. The text on the stone has indeed been translated (and the runestone itself has been moved) and it makes no mention of the wizard Runske or the monster, simply recording the building of a bridge in the 11th century. Since its translation however, alleged sightings of the mysterious Storsie have increased. Between 1986 and 2005 it was even registered as an endangered species.

FIRST SIGHTED
1635

LOCATION
Jämtland, Sweden

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Cat-or dog-headed aquatic reptile

© Getty Images

FIRST SIGHTED
1345

LOCATION
Egilsstaðir, Iceland

CRYPTID TYPE

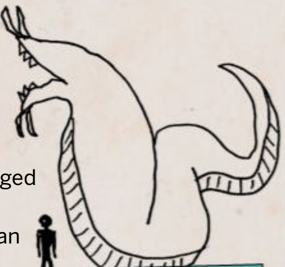
LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

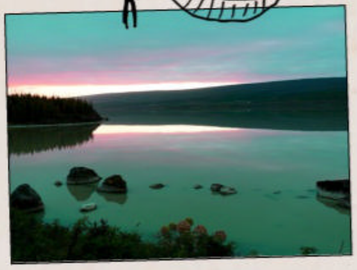
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Super-sized sea slugs

THE LAGARFLJÓT WORM

A wiggly consequence of not looking after creatures properly

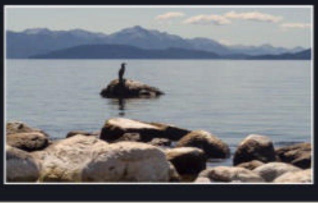
According to Icelandic folklore, an unassuming type of slug called a Heath Worm could be used to guard gold. The problem is that while in contact with the precious metal, the creatures keep growing. Legend has it that the lakes of Iceland are now riddled with unwanted Heath Worms who grew too big for their homes in the nation's medieval hoards, and of these the biggest is undoubtedly the Lagarfljótsormur, or Lagarfljót Worm. Described as around the size of a bus, the worm of Lake Lagarfljót, near the eastern town of Egilsstaðir, has been sighted numerous times, most often since the mid-20th century (Egilsstaðir is a post-war new town, and was only built in 1947). It was even blamed for damaging telephone cables that were laid along the lake bottom in 1983, when the cabling emerged from the water chewed and torn after being placed over an anomaly spotted when engineers were taking depth soundings. There is a video from 2012 that purports to show the Lagarfljótsormur swimming, which was broadcast on Iceland's national TV station, RÚV.





NAHUELITO

Argentina's Nahuel Huapi Lake is apparently home to Nahuelito, a humped serpent-like monster. In 1988 an anonymous tipster sent what he claimed were photos of the creature to the *Río Negro* newspaper. Stories of Nuhuelito go back to the pre-colonial era but became more widespread in the 20th century.



THE LAKE NORMAN MONSTER

Is this crocodile-like creature the result of nuclear pollution?

North Carolina's Lake Norman was constructed in the 1960s as part of the Cowans Ford Hydroelectric Station, which begs the question, how did its watery denizen get there? Most other lake monsters are said to frequent ancient and storied bodies of water, but Normie, as the large, crocodile-like creature is called, is seen in a lake not much over half a century old. And he's seen frequently: fond of chasing boats and jet skis, he's even been known to interact – terrifyingly – with divers. Normie is described as being like a long crocodile in shape, with a dog-like head and red eyes. One jet skier reported that the creature brushed up against his bare leg, leaving a trail of slime that caused an itchy allergic reaction. Explanations for Normie and how he got there range from crocodiles to catfish, to the theory that he's a mutant created by pollution from a nearby nuclear power plant.

Does the humanmade Lake Norman contain a mutant creature twisted by the nearby nuclear power plant?

FIRST SIGHTED
1967

LOCATION
Iredell County, North Carolina, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Mutant catfish or crocodile with a dog-like head and red eyes

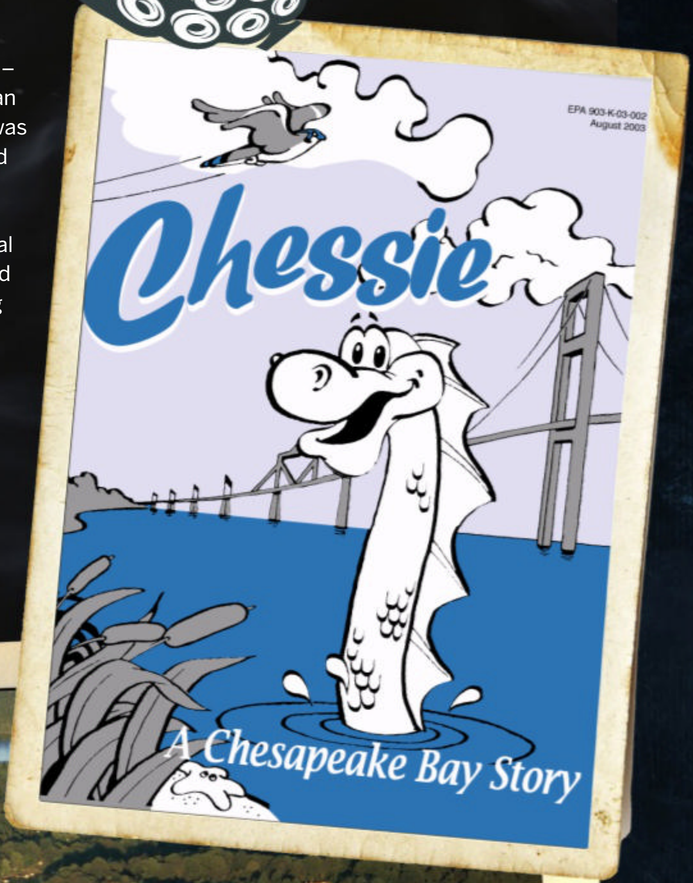
© Alamy and Getty Images

CHESSIE

This contemporary sea beast is used as a way of educating people about environmentalism

Chessie reportedly lives in the USA's Chesapeake Bay, the country's largest estuary that includes parts of the shores of Virginia, Delaware and Maryland. Mainly shallow, its waters are a mix of salt and freshwater and average only 6.4 metres (21 feet) in depth, with nearly a quarter of its area hitting just two metres (six feet) or less. That's not a lot of cover for Chessie, who is reported to be around 3.6 metres (12 feet) in length, with a head the size of an American football and shaped like that of a horse. The first reported sighting of Chessie was in 1936, making her a very modern monster – which perhaps explains her role as an icon of environmentalism. Chessie was the star of two conservation-focused colouring books between 1986 and 1991 and illustrations of her often accompany media stories about local environmental concerns, policies and projects. Despite sightings reporting her as scarily serpentine, Chessie is represented as the friendly face of Chesapeake Bay.

CHESSIE WAS THE STAR OF TWO CONSERVATION-FOCUSSED COLOURING BOOKS BETWEEN 1986 AND 1991



FIRST SIGHTED
1936

LOCATION
Chesapeake Bay, USA

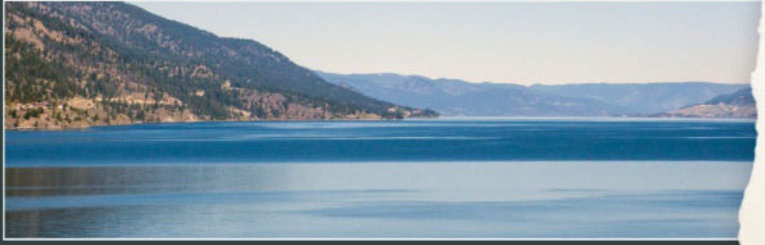
LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikelyt

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Horse-headed sea serpent

OGOPOGO

A lake guardian who has become a video game boss

A 1920s music hall song states that "His mother was an earwig, his father was a whale", but Okanagan Lake's resident monster, Ogopogo, has roots that go much further back. The lake in Canada's British Columbia is named after the First Nations people of the region, and it's in their ancient oral histories that the creature first raises his sleek dark head from the depths. Called Naitaka, he is a lake guardian who requires a sacrifice, usually a small animal, from those who want to cross his sacred waters. A visiting chief once refused to make an offering to Naitaka, who whipped up a storm with his tail and dragged the chief's canoe to the bottom of the lake. Ogopogo's reputation hit its nadir during the European settlement of British Columbia, but improved throughout the 20th century and beyond. Today Oggy is an iconic symbol of the region and has even made a starring appearance in video game *Final Fantasy IV*, as a boss in the game's final dungeon.



FIRST SIGHTED
Pre-Columbian era

LOCATION
British Columbia, Canada

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Many-humped sea serpent

FIRST SIGHTED
1609

LOCATION
Lake Champlain, Vermont, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Serpentine with a horse-like head

Whatever the truth of the Lake Champlain monster, today Champ has got a successful career as a Vermont baseball mascot

CHAMP

Another dinosaur descendant or just an abnormaly large fish?

Lake Champlain is a long thin body of water stretching south from the Canadian province of Quebec into the US states of New York and Vermont. It's also the home of Champ, a long serpentine cryptid with a horse-like head. In the 1800s a Captain Crum reported that it had eyes "the colour of peeled onions" and that he had seen it swimming accompanied by two sturgeons and a billfish. Stories of Champ caught the interest of notorious showman PT Barnam, who in 1873 and 1887 offered rewards to anyone who could capture the creature for use in his circuses.

Some theories think that, like Nessie, Champ could potentially be a plesiosaur whose ancestors survived the extinction of the dinosaurs, while others claim that the so-called monster is simply a particularly big longnose gar fish. Whatever Champ may or may not be, today he has an excellent career moonlighting as a sports mascot for baseball team the Vermont Lake Monsters.

SELMA

Short for Seljordsormen, or 'worm of Lake Seljordsvatnet' (worm in this context, like the related words wyrm and orm, means dragon), the eerie Selma is believed to dwell in the icy depths of this Norwegian lake. In 1918 fisherman Karl Karlsson encountered the beast and reported that it had a horse-like head. Later that year, Torgil Bjorge saw a large animal he likened to a crocodile. Two years later, Eivind Fjodstuft saw a similar animal creeping out of the water. Neither Bjorge nor Fjodstuft startled the creature.

FIRST SIGHTED
1918

LOCATION
Telemark, Norway

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Confirmed

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Serpentine beast that has a horse-like head, or possibly looks like a crocodile

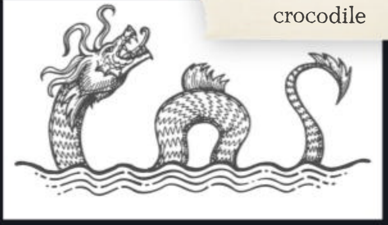


Image source: Wiki/ Fancy-cats-are-happy-cats/ Britt Eckardt Slattery/ Andreaze; Getty; Alamy; Adobe Stock (AI generator)

WALGREN LAKE MONSTER

Given the questions surrounding the source of this monster, it's easy to forget about the actual monster itself

It's fair to say that in the world of cryptozoology, mud sticks. The dubious reputation of the foremost 'witness' to the phenomenon of the Walgren Lake Monster has meant that the plausibility of the monster's existence has been highly contested.

There were certainly whispers of the existence of this 12-metre (40-foot) long, sometimes horned, sometimes furry, sometimes scaley, lake creature's presence in the Sand Hills area of Nebraska from as far back as Native American times. This apparently foul-smelling cryptid was said to lurk in the somewhat petite lake (once known as the Alkali Lake) as well as other local bodies of water, venturing out to bother livestock and terrify those who strayed too close.

However the creature's form coalesced into what we know of it today in earnest sometime around the 1920s and to put it plainly, the whiff of deception around the reports of what was dubbed 'Giganticus Brutervious' is widely acknowledged as having been as strong as that of the lamented animal itself.

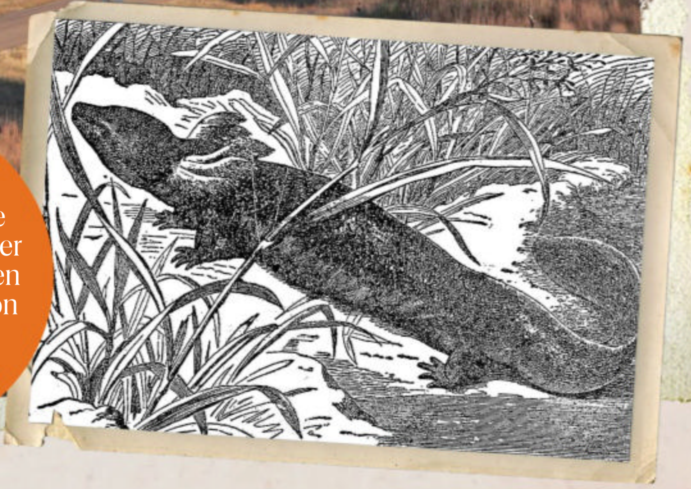
The issue lies with the 'source' of most of the reports, a Mr John G. Maher of local rag *Hay Spring News*. His undeniably compelling written reports of sightings of the beast, starting in 1921, were engaging enough to reach the ears of the faraway *Omaha Times* and even the *London Times* (via telegram). The steady trickle of sightings he provided contained tantalising details. In 1922, he wrote, a JA Johnson was "roared" at by a creature both crocodilian and simultaneously be-horned. Further sightings seemed to be getting increasingly fantastical, with glowing eyes and even an ability to influence weather listed among the characteristics of the beast.

The problem was that Mr Maher was also one of the most notorious hoaxers of the age, the mastermind behind such spectacles as the Petrified Man (a concrete statue based horrifically around the corpse of a Buffalo Soldier from the Civil War) and scare-mongering articles warning Irish republicans that British Army representatives were making their way up the Mississippi for retribution.

All of this has left our poor cryptid friend, the lake monster itself, as being somewhat the bridesmaid at its own wedding. To the extent that, in answer to the presumably oft-asked question of why the number of reported sightings had seemed to suspiciously dwindle since the 20s, *NebraskaLand* magazine posited that the creature was sulking due to lack of attention. Whatever the case, the local community still treat the lake's possible resident with a degree of reverence, and it has become a popular local symbol in the area, appearing as a mascot for sports teams and a popular Halloween costume choice when autumn comes around.

THIS APPARENTLY FOUL-SMELLING CRYPTID WAS SAID TO LURK IN THE SOMEWHAT PETITE LAKE [ONCE KNOWN AS THE ALKALI LAKE]

The Sandhills area of Western Nebraska, home to Walgren Lake



Some think that the Walgren Lake Monster is a simply a mistaken sighting of a common mud puppy

Image source: WikiP_D Nebraska_Sandhills. Credit P_D Ammodramus

MOKÈLÉ-MBÈMBÉ

Despite various expeditions, the lack of evidence for this creature might see it drop off the cryptid radar

FIRST SIGHTED
No confirmed sightings

LOCATION
DRC, Cameroon

CRYPTID TYPE
4

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Like a long-necked dinosaur

He's a vegetarian but known for his ferocious temper. He kills hippos with ease but doesn't eat them, and their corpses have been found discarded without wounds. His name – Mokèlé-mbèmbé – has been said to mean 'one who stops the flow of rivers' in Lingala language, but some have sworn blind that it simply means 'rainbow'. In short, it's fair to say that this 'sauropod-like', river-bend and cave-dwelling introvert is a complicated character.

The search for Mokèlé-mbèmbé, as with all of the 'living dinosaurs' reported around the Congo Basin (see below) is about much more than who or what it is. This region's history has been scarred even more than most by violent conflict, colonial plundering and even today, the mining for precious mineral components that power our electronics under a cloak of secrecy. It's a terrain that, even now, many from the West simply do not dare to step foot in. All the more space for speculation…

'Documentation' of Mokèlé-mbèmbé's existence has included the Glencomeragh carving of unknown but implied ancient origin, featuring a diplodocus-like figure; an 1800s image of a footprint bearing dinosaur-like toe-span; and faraway footage of strange ripples in the water by a Japanese helicopter crew. Yes, despite a series of fact-finding expeditions – including a 32-man voyage by the American Smithsonian museum in 1919 (that ended in a devastating train crash) and deep interest by Creationist researchers in the 1980s – all evidence of Mokèlé-mbèmbé's existence has been peripheral. Most earlier interest has also died down, leaving this solitary beast the space it apparently craves… at least for now.

Navigating the river Congo,especially at its bends, you might just bump into a cryptid

NGUMA-MONENE

Could this be another 'living dinosaur' taking up residence in the Congo Basin?

FIRST SIGHTED
1960s

LOCATION
Cameroon, DRC

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Serpent-like creature with a forked tongue and serrated ridge along the spine

As if one terrifying water-dwelling cryptid wasn't enough for one African region, the 'living dinosaur' family of the Congo RiverBasin includes a handful of other big name cryptids.

The Nguma-monene tale gets started prior to the 20th century, with word-of-mouth sightings taking place that are attributed to different local names. The common factor that can be found in all of those accounts was the beast's snake-like tendencies: a forked tongue and serrated back.

The first robust sighting came in 1961, when a sister of a famous politician described an encounter with the head and neck of a snake "but much larger" while swimming in the River Motaba, with the creature displaying its forked tongue. Onlookers corroborated the account. The second, and only other account considered worthy, came from missionary Joseph Ellis who came up against a serpent-like creature in the same river, this time with a serrated back.

Where does that leave us? Some have said that the creature could be a living dimetridon – but that idea has been laughed out of the water (pun intended), given that the species became extinct significantly earlier than even the dinosaur period. It has also been suggested that Nguma-monene – despite its name meaning 'large boa' – is simply a large form of the very real monitor lizard. Debate all seems to hinge around the fact that the lower part of the creature's body has never been seen. Perhaps let's all check back in when he – literally – finds his feet.

Right: Image generated in Adobe Firefly AI. Above: © Getty Images

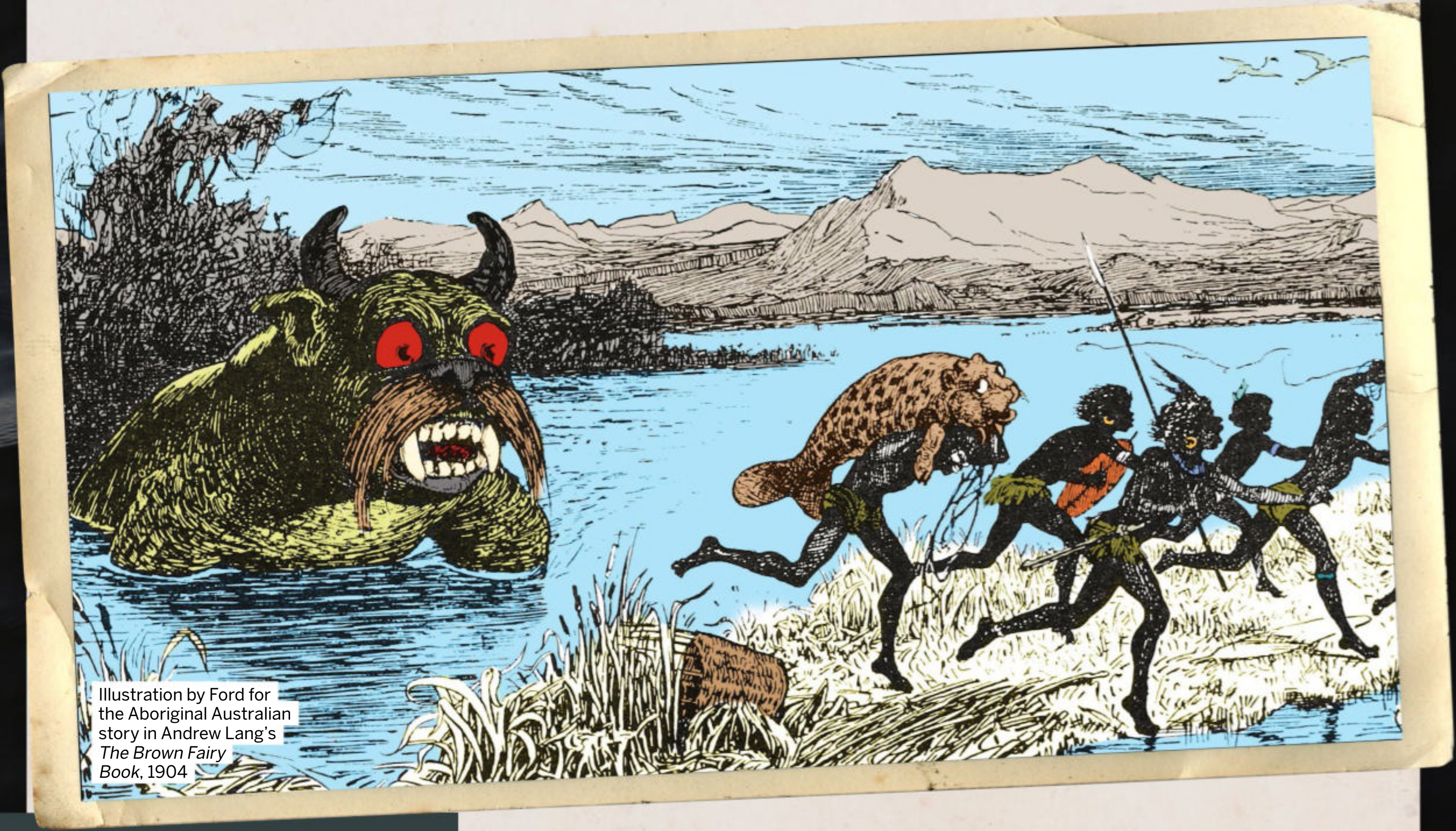


Illustration by Ford for the Aboriginal Australian story in Andrew Lang's *The Brown Fairy Book*, 1904

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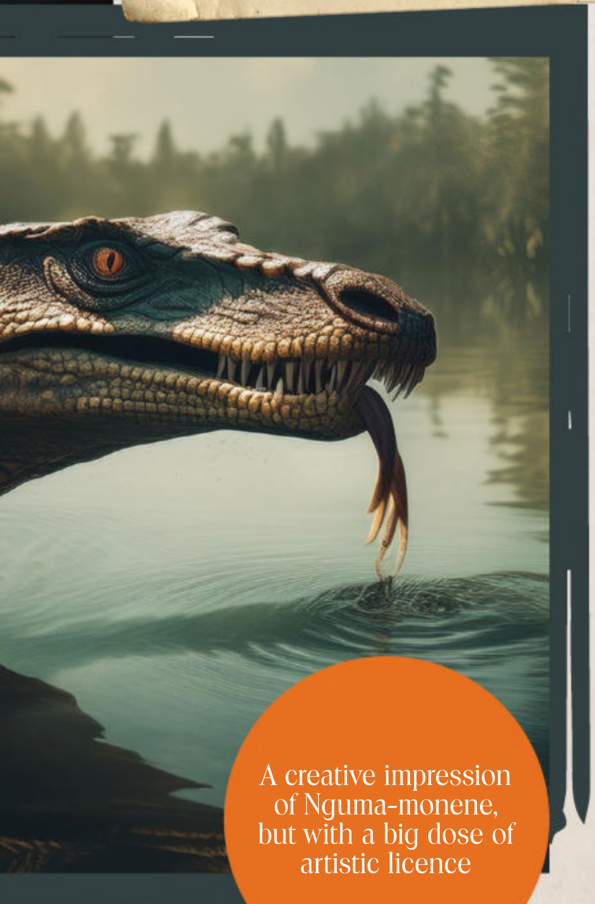


A creative impression of Nguma-monene, but with a big dose of artistic licence

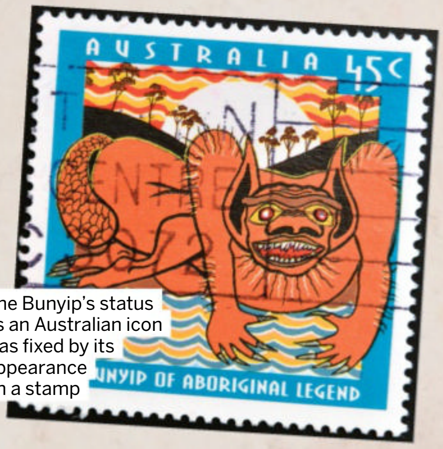
BUNYIP

The only consistent characteristic of this creature is that it inhabits lakes, swamps or rivers

The word 'Bunyip' has been traced back to the Wemba-Wemba people of South East Australia, translated as 'devil'. It has been described variously as human or bear-like in figure, ox-like or even hippo, or manatee-esque with flippers. What does recur across the tales is that this creature inhabits lakes, swamps and rivers, but accounts disagree on whether it is gentle or malevolent. Some tribes were said to warn their children of its predilection for dining on women and children.

The disparity of accounts stems from the country's complex history; Australia is a vast continent, containing hundreds of tribes. For many European settlers, even the existing Antipodean wildlife would have been profoundly mystifying in its own right. Perhaps, they reasoned, the Bunyip was just another undiscovered species.

The word Bunyip first appeared on paper in 1845 with a story in the *Geelong Advertiser* telling of a fossil that was supposedly "identified" by an Aboriginal Australian as belonging to the creature: a bird-like crocodile hybrid. In 1847, reports came about in New South Wales of a skull at the Australian Museum, identified by numerous locals as a Bunyip – it was later dismissed as a calf or foal's head. Later that year, a crowd in the city of Melbourne reported seeing "a Bunyip or large platypus" on a river bank. In 1857, an illustrator named Edwin Stocqueler reported having seen the Bunyip, but described it as a "large, freshwater seal". This chimes with the idea that the creature is in reality a seal-like creature who found its way inland.



The Bunyip's status as an Australian icon was fixed by its appearance on a stamp

@ Alamy

Little Shop Of Horrors perfectly captured the stereotype of the batty plant person

CRYPTOBOTANY

If you go down to the woods today, bring a camera… and possibly some sharp gardening shears

We all know that forests are a place where mysteries and stories of magical happenings proliferate. But we also live in the 21st century where, if humankind haven't already chopped down great swathes of those forests, someone will have certainly tried. Nevertheless mysteries still remain.

When we talk about cryptobotany, it's important to distinguish what we mean. While the endless myths and legends found in folklore around the world inform these accounts, what we're talking about when we use the word cryptobotany, is the research around a plant with mythical qualities that could plausibly be real.

It's perhaps obvious to say that people have always looked at the wondrous and weird vegetation in their environs and tried to factor them into the wider questions about our place on Earth; not least when it came to those that offered medicinal or psychotropic qualities. It's in that vein that we see mention of the legendary lotus flower, found in the Nile region and as far afield as Ancient Greece. The Lotophagi, or Lotus-eaters, mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey*, were a people whose diets consisted only of the tree's fruit and so, the legend goes, they forgot what was important in their lives and instead lived a life of idleness. It's thought that one of the candidates for its inspiration is the Diospyros lotus or date-plum tree, found in Africa.

Elsewhere, you see the Slavic legends of the annually blooming fern plant which, when taken, gives the person in question a whole range of reported short-term benefits, from the ability to talk to animals, to increased sex drive and subsequently, fertility.

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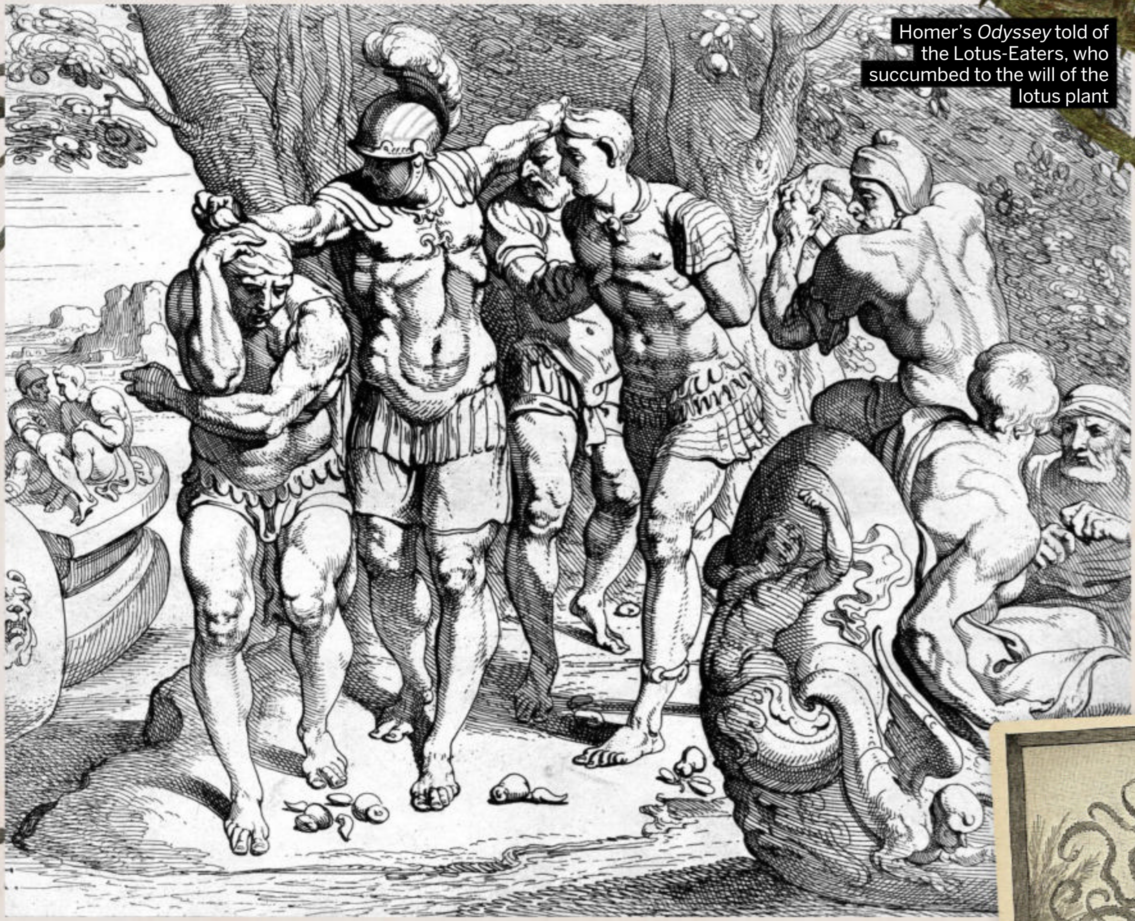
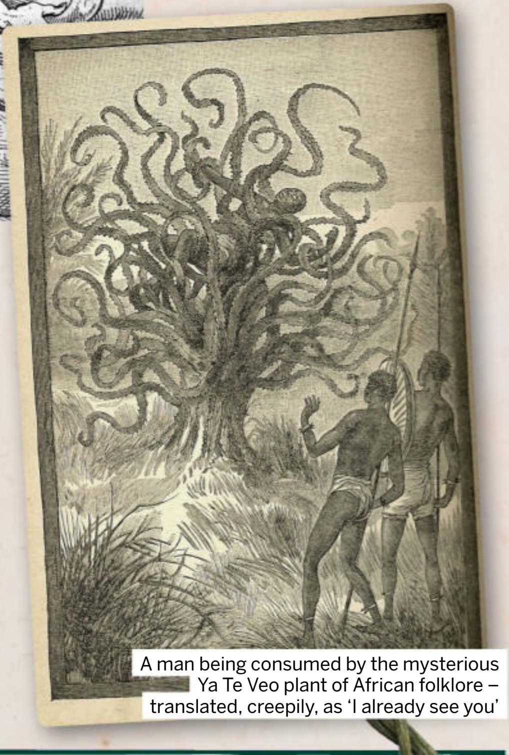


Homer's *Odyssey* told of the Lotus-Eaters, who succumbed to the will of the lotus plant

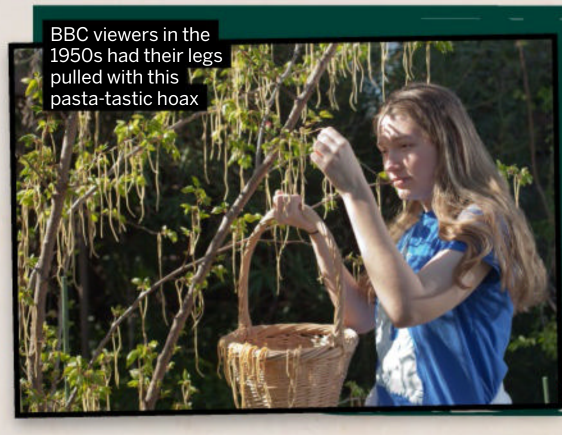
The mandrake root - it's easy to see why its human-like form got tongues wagging

Last but not least in this category is the Mandrake plant, a plant that is known to exist, but whose weird, human-like form has stirred imaginations for time immemorial, and that's even before the tale-spinners ingested any of its pulse-racing, narcotic fruit. Tales of these fantastical substances – with tantalising threads of truth – have echoes of what we see in the search for cryptid plants throughout subsequent history.

But the plants and trees that cryptobotanists are on the hunt for aren't mythical per se – those active in the field aren't basing their enquiries on fictional accounts or legends; rather they pick up threads from old accounts by earlier explorers, or word of mouth local reports – however slim the pickings – and enjoy the process of whittling down the evidence. The luckier, more well-funded few, might be given grants for expeditions by interested backers. Hence, you see a tongue-in-cheek stereotype emerging of what your typical cryptobotanist looks like, as seen in films like *Little Shop Of Horrors*, in which a fictional plant enthusiast creates a monster. In some ways you could say these are morality tales in their own right: "Look what happens if you delve too deeply into what nature has up its sleeve". As we see in the examples on the following pages, sometimes what nature has up its sleeve is scary indeed.



A man being consumed by the mysterious Ya Te Veo plant of African folklore – translated, creepily, as 'I already see you'



BBC viewers in the 1950s had their legs pulled with this pasta-tastic hoax

THE SPAGHETTI TREE HOAX

As a cautionary tale about believing everything you read, on 1 April 1957, the BBC broadcast a three-minute news segment, narrated by the always assuring tones of Richard Dimbleby, showing a family in southern Switzerland as they performed their yearly harvesting ritual of a delicious substance. That substance? Strings of spaghetti. To modern eyes, the joke might seem ludicrous, but it's worth remembering that in the 1950s, pasta would have been a fairly uncommon dish in the UK. Nevertheless, it's in this light that we remind readers to always consume the information surrounding cryptobotany and other crypto-fields with a handful of salt… while enjoying the delicious nuggets of truth therein!

VAMPIRE PLANT

Keep your wits about you, otherwise you may be bitten…

Chiapas in Mexico is a magical place in a whole array of ways, with its Mayan archaeology and coffee plantations, among other strange and alluring brews. When Spanish conquistadors came through the land, many tribespeople retreated deep into the forest. French explorer, Byron de Prorok, was therefore certainly not the first to venture there in the 1930s, but he was the first to report back a chilling tale. On his way through the forests, he apparently watched a gruesome scene play out as a bird landed on one of the leaves, and proceeded to scream in agony as deep thorns seared into its body. De Prorok's local guides knew the plant in question well: it was known in the area as the Vampire Plant.

Cryptobotany expert, Karl Shuker, believes this plant may well be related to similar cryptid plants living in Central and Latin America that share a similar taxonomy: the rotting-flesh-perfumed Brazilian Bird-eating Tree, the Mexican Snake Tree and Nicaraguan Dog-devouring Tree, whose activities are all spine-chillingly described in their respective names.

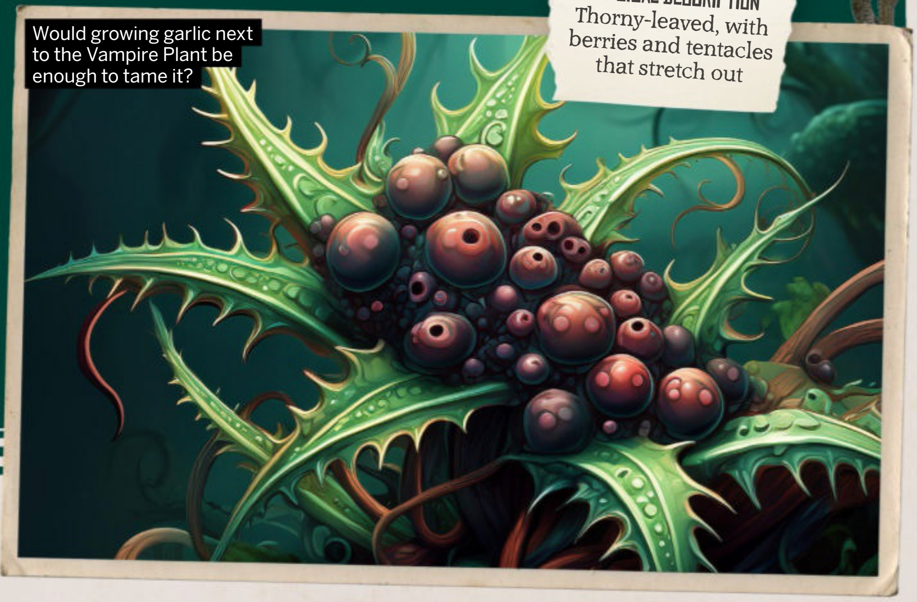
While we're on the topic, it's worth noting that keen botanists with a taste for all things vampiric (or vampire-adjacent) will love Mexico in general; in Guadalajara, they can also find a tree which, legend goes, has sprouted out from the remains of a human vampire, who was lynched and buried by locals and then took his revenge in the after-after life.

FIRST SIGHTED
1930s

LOCATION
Chiapas, Mexico

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Jury's still out

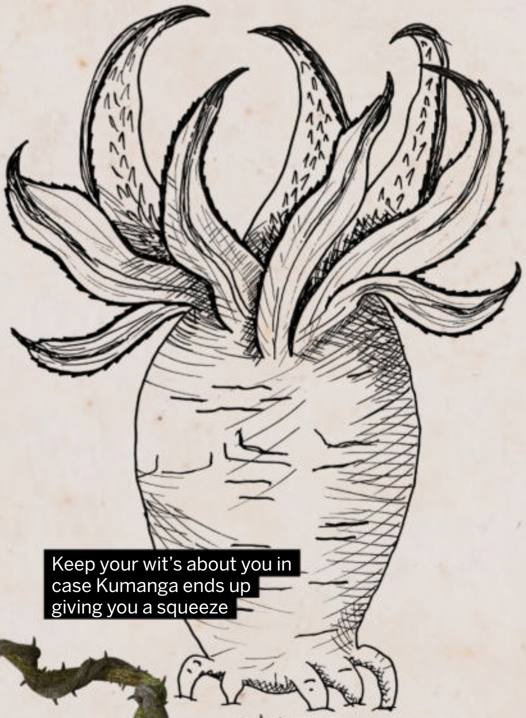
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Thorny-leaved, with berries and tentacles that stretch out



Would growing garlic next to the Vampire Plant be enough to tame it?

KUMANGA

Be careful not to get trapped in the Devil's claws…



Keep your wit's about you in case Kumanga ends up giving you a squeeze

Cryptobotanic interest in the plant life of the island of Madagascar has deep and very tangled roots. One of the most famous stories in the field comes from accounts of a plant – and the rituals surrounding it – that were described by German explorer Karl Liche, who visited the isle in 1874 and found himself in the midst of a giant pineapple-like tree. In his story, he claims to have witnessed a gathering of tribespeople under the plant, in which a tribeswoman was forced to drink a cup of the plant's sap, subsequently awaking serpent like 'palpi', which reached out, writhing, to strangle and kill the woman. If this story doesn't seem like it quite checks out to you, you're not alone. Firstly, as you might have deduced, no evidence has ever been found of a plant with the muscular strength to gather up an adult woman, much less power hundreds of other branches in such a movement or telepathically be triggered in this way. Secondly, even the existence of Karl Liche has been disputed, with the assumption being that the character was instead dreamed up by a bored journalist as an Indiana Jones figure who could sell some newspapers.

All of this doubt didn't stop tongues wagging, however. In the 1930s, American *Botanix* magazine offered $10,000 to anyone who could provide a specimen. British ex-soldier, L Hirst, duly returned with the goods, in the form of a photo of some animals under a tree, but was laughed at on presenting the 'evidence'. With fresh verve, he returned to Madagascar to provide more evidence… and never returned.

However the Madagascan cryptid story doesn't end there, and that's where the name Kumanga enters the picture. Czech scientist Ivan Mackerle, visiting the island in the 1990s, did indeed procure seeds for something known to locals as the Devil's Claw, which some in the cryptobotany community have said means the case is essentially closed. However, as so often is the case, the story has been more or less left on a cliffhanger – a deficit of time, resources and lack of curiosity from the scientific community? Or a conspiracy of silence? We may never know.

FIRST SIGHTED
2017

LOCATION
New Jersey, USA

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

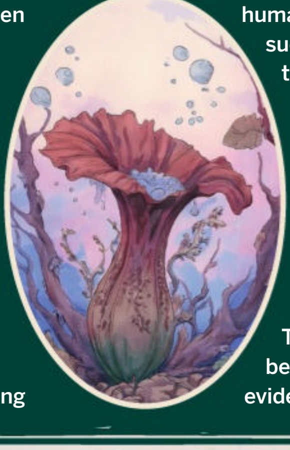
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Bulbous cup filled with digestive liquid, large enough to swallow down a human

GIANT PITCHER PLANT

Is there a plant out there that can swallow a human?

The pitcher plant, in its common form, is a well-documented, endlessly photographed phenomenon – to the extent that one variant has been named after zoology titan and fan David Attenborough, the Nepenthes attenboroughii. This plant, seen in different locales globally, is known for luring and drowning prey, before digesting whole insects and even small mammals, notably rodents.

A new chapter came into view, however, when a tantalizing account appeared under a YouTube video, by a user describing an encounter in New Jersey, USA, of all places. It told of a youngster on a hunting trip and a giant version of the pitcher plant – big enough, the user says, to swallow a human, although in this case, no such homicide ensued. This tale was gleefully circulated but, evidently was always likely to be shot down given the complete lack of evidence. That hasn't stopped some wishful thinking on the part of other netizens, however. And it's fair to say that whole Transatlantic expeditions have been launched on the historical evidence of far less!



FIRST SIGHTED
1581

LOCATION
South Pacific, near Easter Island

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

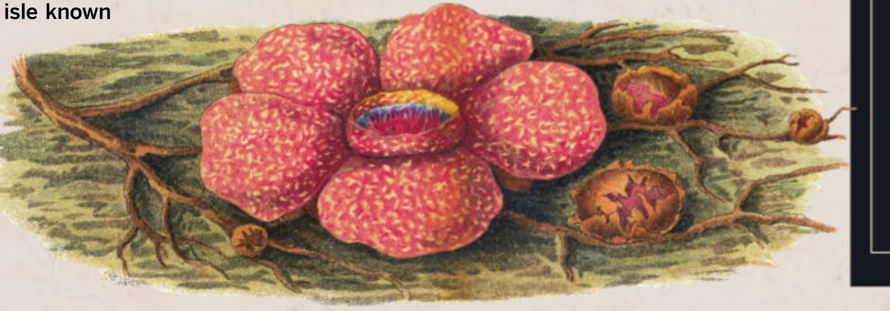
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Look like a stereotypical cartoon flower, only in gigantic proportions

DEATH FLOWER OF EL BANOOR

A mysterious plant on a mysterious island

One of the most towering tales of cryptobotany, the Death Flower Of El Banoor, doesn't just feature a deeply unlikely yet mesmerising plant species, but it all takes place on an island that no-one has ever been able to locate on a modern map. In 1581, Captain Hugh Arkwright wrote in his ship's logbook of a swashbuckling adventure on a South Pacific island, as he and some local guides ventured onto a mysterious atoll, enclosing a "forbidden" inner isle known as 'Isle of Death'. It doesn't look like Captain Arkwright took the bait and attempted a visit himself, perhaps sensibly, but he was told that upon the island dwelled "a great, hooded flower, of weird and wondrous beauty" with a seductive odour that meant anyone stepping foot on the island would find themselves entranced in a dream-like stupor and ultimately consumed by the plant.

As mentioned, modern botanists have been unable to locate such an island, but have speculated that what was described was an exaggerated testimony of an early Venus fly trap sighting. It's also been posited that it could be a form of the real plant Rafflesia, or corpse lily, but with its world-renowned bad smell, it seems a far cry from the seductive perfume described. Overall, though, it's certainly a great yarn.



BRAZILIAN DEVIL TREE

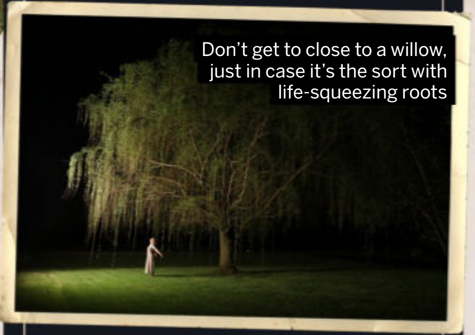
FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Mato Grosso, Brazil

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Shape-shifting tree that looks like a willow, only to unearth its roots to squeeze its victim

This Brazilian cryptid is a master of disguise. Similar to a willow tree at first glance, you'll soon find that the ground beneath your feet is literally moving, as its roots rise up to begin its attack, wrapping itself around the victim's body like a boa-constrictor.



Don't get to close to a willow, just in case it's the sort with life-squeezing roots

JUY-JUY

FIRST SIGHTED
Unknown

LOCATION
Gran Chaco, Bolivia/Argentina border

LIKELIHOOD OF EXISTENCE
Unlikely

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
Giant flower with a sleep-inducing scent and blossom containing suckers to eat victims

You shouldn't always trust a pretty face. This reportedly beautiful plant, found in the Gran Chaco region around the Bolivia border of Argentina, an area boasting the world's largest tropical dry forest, apparently snares its prey by means of a soporific scent. Once you're safely in the land of nod, the tales go, its sucker-bestowed blossom is sent down to devour you. Little evidence exists, and sadly, given the reported depletion of forest land in the area, we may never know.

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Editor **Alice Pattillo**
Senior Designer **Harriet Knight**
Compiled by **Dan Peel**
Head of Art & Design **Greg Whitaker**
Editorial Director **Jon White**
Managing Director **Grainne McKenna**

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Editor **Jonathan Gordon**
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Contributors
Lora Barnes, Kate Cherrell, Jo Cole, Catherine Curzon, Joanna Elphick,
Ailsa Harvey, Callum McKelvie, Darren Naish, Kate Puttick, Icy Sedgwick
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Printed in the UK

Distributed by Marketforce – www.marketforce.co.uk
For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

GPSR EU RP (for authorities only)
eucomply OÜ Pärnu mnt 139b-14 11317, Tallinn, Estonia
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All About History Guide to Cryptids Second Edition (AHB6842)
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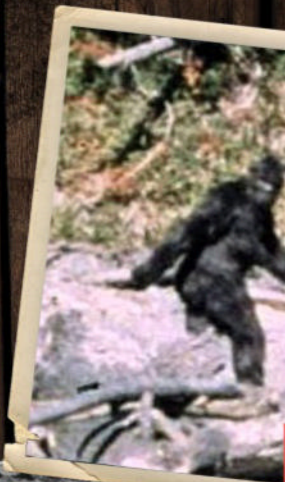

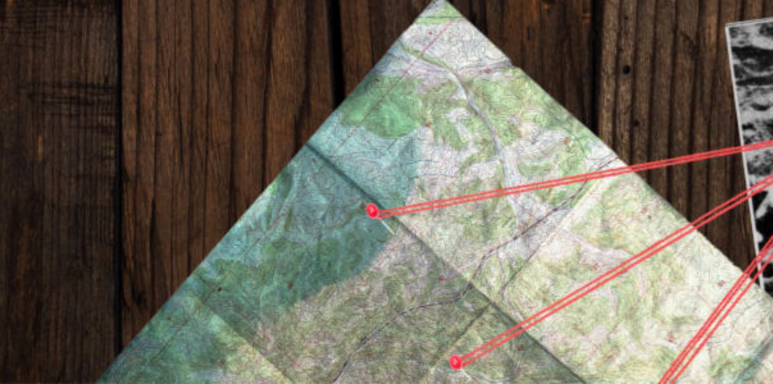

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